

Bandwagon

Vol. 60 No. 2 2016



The Journal of the Circus Historical Society

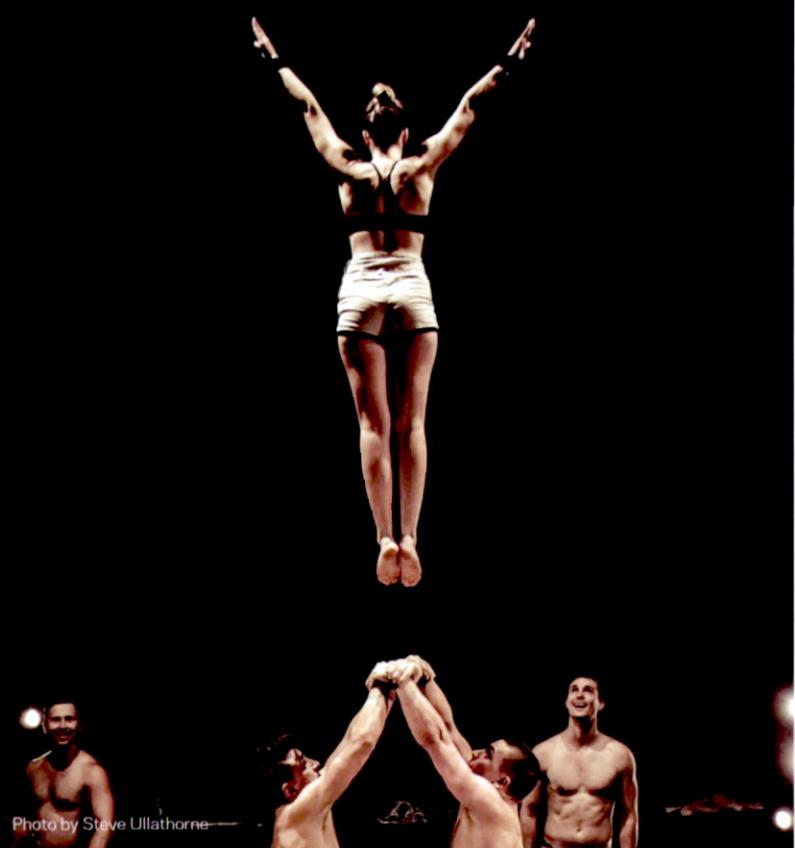


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"To preserve, promote, and share through education the history and cultural significance of the circus and allied arts, past and present."

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Notes from the Editor

The content of this issue represents a mix of the best of circus history. Mary Kwas, who came to her Wild West subject, C. W. Riggs, by way of her own training in archaeology, has given us a fascinating and wonderfully researched study of how one man went from excavating prehistoric mounds in Arkansas to staging his own Wild West show. Fred Pfening III shared the second story, a reprint of a 1936 article about the Ringling show's hospital car, the *Florence Nightingale*. The Ringling PR department used the addition of the car to reach into new media outlets, with this article and variations upon it, running in medical journals. Then we have more of Jackie LeClaire's rich and entertaining memoirs. His insight into life on the Ringling show is a fascinating and fun read, and I am so grateful to him for sharing his stories.

On the covers, I am very excited to be able to share these beautiful and rare posters from the collection of the Shelburne Museum. I am grateful to Kory Rogers and Kristen Levesque for meeting a tight deadline to allow us to feature these posters and their story. If you make it near Vermont this year, be sure to make a stop by the Shelburne and see them in person.

Along with our contributors, thanks are due to those who have helped with all of the steps along the way, John and Mardi Wells have once again produced a lovely issue. Bob Cline, Steve Flint and Dominic Yodice all helped in looking for images of the *Florence Nightingale*. And finally, both Fred Dahlinger and Kenny Dodd were once again of assistance in verifying facts and providing photo identifications.

Scheduling changes have resulted in bumping our special focus on African Americans in traveling entertainments to the number three issue of this year. This topic has proven as challenging as we knew it would be, but Fred Dahlinger, Jr. has diligently gathered a strong group of articles and I am looking forward to that special issue.

Finally, I hope by now many of you are making your plans to join fellow CHS members as we gather in Sarasota, Florida this October. Highlights including Circus Arts Conservatory, The Showfolks Club, Feld Entertainment and The Rosaires' Big Cat Habitat, will allow CHS members to experience many of the treasures of this circus community. Members may also choose to visit The Ringling Museum, Bob's Train, and a variety of historic circus sites. We've included a registration sheet in this mailing – we hope you can join us in Sarasota!

JLP

On the Covers

by Kory W. Rogers, Curator, Shelburne Museum

Shelburne Museum is excited and honored to have two of its so-called “Colchester” circus posters featured on both the front and back covers of this issue of *Bandwagon*. The front cover features the exotic and dangerous beauty of Nala Damajante “The Hindoo Snake Charmer” who performed for Adam Forepaugh’s circus in the early 1880s. The poster on the back cover portrays the extraordinary African-American conjoined twins Millie Christine who were the star attraction for John B. Doris’ Great Inter-Ocean Circus and Menagerie during the same time period. The poster for Nala Damajante was discovered in 1991 along with four other large posters hidden beneath the exterior siding on Harold and Gladys Degree’s home in Colchester, Vermont. Millie Christine was discovered later in 2010 hidden underneath the poster of Nala Damajante.

Exposed during a routine renovation project, the original five circus posters, including Nala Damajante, advertised the July 26, 1883 performance of The Great Forepaugh Museum, Menagerie, Triple Circus, and Roman Hippodrome in the neighboring port city of Burlington. As chronicled in the July/August 1991 issue of *Bandwagon*, a second layer of posters was detected under the Forepaugh ads as they were being removed from the home’s façade—still attached to their boards. In 2010, after nearly two decades in storage, four of the five posters were conserved. Both layers of fragile posters were taken off their timber substrates and then separated; revealing six posters for John B. Doris’ Great Inter-Ocean Circus and Menagerie, including its marquee act Millie Christine.

The newly exposed Great Inter-Ocean Circus posters proved to be evidence of a hard fought advertising war waged between the billers working for Adam Forepaugh’s and John B. Doris’ shows. The advance teams of both circuses crossed paths in the Green Mountain State in the summer of 1883. Both shows were scheduled to play the same route one month apart with Doris arriving in Burlington first on June 22. Both Doris and Forepaugh were competing for the patronage for Burlington’s 11,347 citizens and the 21,418 residents of the entire Lake Champlain Valley region. In order to make a profit, each showman had to neutralize the competition, for Forepaugh it meant covering over Doris’ posters.

At the time Forepaugh’s billers were pasting Nala Damajante’s poster over Millie Christine’s, the conjoined

siblings were suing Adam Forepaugh for libel in U.S. Circuit Court in Indiana. The complaint for *Millie Christine v. Adam Forepaugh*, alleged that the showman “composed and published” libelous show bills (known in circus parlance as “rat sheets”) that were distributed in and around the Fort Wayne area. The incident occurred one year earlier in 1882 when Forepaugh’s and Doris’ circus routes collided in the State of Indiana. Millie Christine sued for compensatory damages in the amount of \$25,000, or one year salary, claiming that the rat sheet were distributed with the “malicious intent” to deprive her of a means to “become independent and beyond the danger of want.” The suit languished for years and was ultimately never adjudicated and dismissed in large part due to the nomadic nature of both traveling shows.

In the end, both circuses enjoyed success in Burlington. According to the local newspaper the *Burlington Daily Free Press & Times*, Doris’ show though it could not “rival Barnum’s or Forepaugh’s in size,” was “very good as far as it goes.” Forepaugh’s route book listed Burlington as a “good night’s business,” however the show’s departure was marred by a train derailment that injured a canvas man and delayed their exit.

The discovery of Shelburne Museum’s Colchester Posters shed light on the disreputable tactics employed by rival circuses in an attempt to annihilate the competition.

Nala Damajante and Millie Christine along with the ten other “Colchester” posters will feature prominently in the “Clash of the Circus Titans” section of Shelburne Museum’s upcoming exhibition *Papering the Town: Circus Posters in America* on view July 9, 2016 through January 22, 2017. The exhibition will feature some of the oldest, rarest, and largest circus posters in Shelburne Museum’s collection. Examples like the *Zoological Institute of the City of New York*, (1835) and *Mr. Sage Proprietor of the American Circus* (1843) have rarely been shown due to their immense size and extreme age. For more information, visit www.shelburnemuseum.org.

Front Cover: Make unknown, *Nala Damajante: Snake Charmer*, 1883. Wood-block print on paper, 35½ x 42 in. Collection of Shelburne Museum, gift of Harold and Gladys Degree. 1991-18.1. Photography by Andy Dubak.

Back Cover: Make unknown, *Millie Christine “Two Headed Lady”*, 1883. Wood-block print on paper, 33¼ x 40¼ in. Collection of Shelburne Museum, gift of Harold and Gladys Degree. 1991-18.6. Photography by MJ Davis.

WIGWAMS, TENT SHOWS, AND THE WILD WEST:

*The Entertainment
Ventures of Captain
C. W. Riggs, 1899-1909*

by Mary L. Kwas



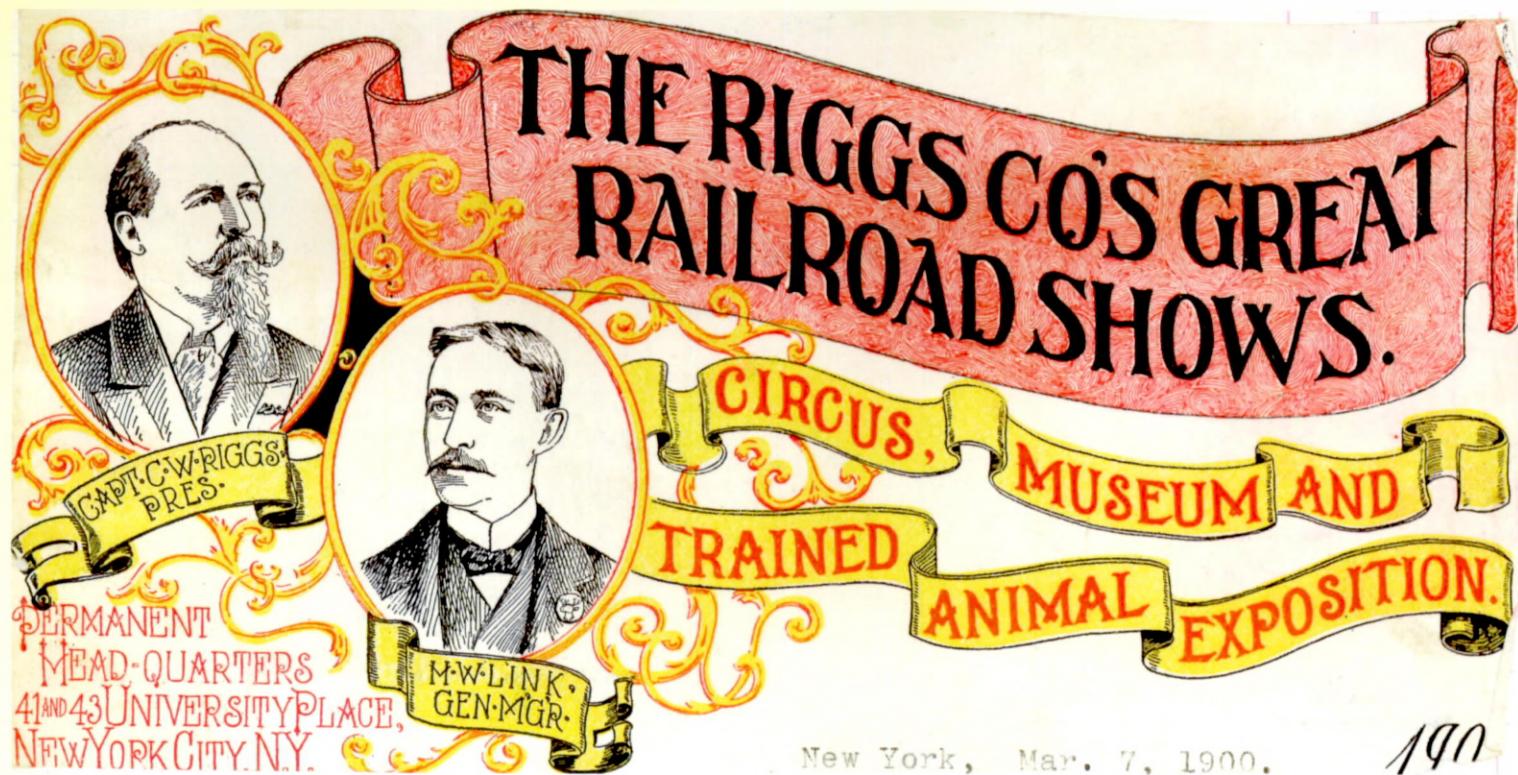
In June 1913, having retired to a farm in Greenland, Arkansas, C. W. Riggs sent a letter to *The Billboard* describing a visit to see Honest Bill's show that played in nearby Springdale. He began by reminiscing on his old life: "The simple life has its manifold allurement, after having been years in the game, but...there is a fascination in the call of the white top that at times is simply irresistible. If [a show] gets within 50 or 100 miles...we are there (and we mean the whole family), to get once more in our nostrils, the odor of the sawdust, and the smothering perfume of the grass as the 'big top' goes up over it."¹

In 1913 Riggs was 56 years old and had already spent close to 30 years on the road in several shifting, but inter-related careers, only the last of which was in the entertainment industry. Beginning about 1884, he spent 10 years as an explorer of Indian mounds, excavating thousands of pieces of pottery from mounds in eastern Arkansas and exhibiting his finds at expositions and museums. Beginning about 1894, he traveled the Southwest buying Indian curios and ethnographic materials, which he exhibited and sold at large department stores in the East. Finally, beginning about 1899, he embarked on a number of entertainment ventures, culminating in a Wild West show that traveled

through the South and Midwest. He had done enough to fill three or four lifetimes.

Riggs combined the skills of a businessman with the personality of a showman, wrapped around an identity and livelihood linked to the late 19th-century myth of the "vanishing race" of American Indians. He was a character in his own right, dressing like a frontiersman, living on a house-boat, having a passion for red-haired women, and fathering 12 children with five of them. Yet his life was a roller-coaster, ranging from the highs of financial and popular success to the lows of failed ventures and disasters. Enjoying a certain celebrity in his own time, he has been all but forgotten today. It is time to return him to the spotlight.

Riggs was most active in the entertainment industry from 1899-1909, and this period is the focus of the article. I will begin, however, with a biographical sketch of Riggs to place this period in context within his full life and other activities. Details about Riggs's life were gathered through numerous primary documents, including census records, courthouse documents, newspaper articles, etc. In the interest of space, I will limit my citations largely to the focus of the article.



Letterhead for Captain C. W. Riggs's 1900 enterprise.

New York, Mar. 7, 1900.

1900

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

A Practical Mound Explorer (1884-1893)

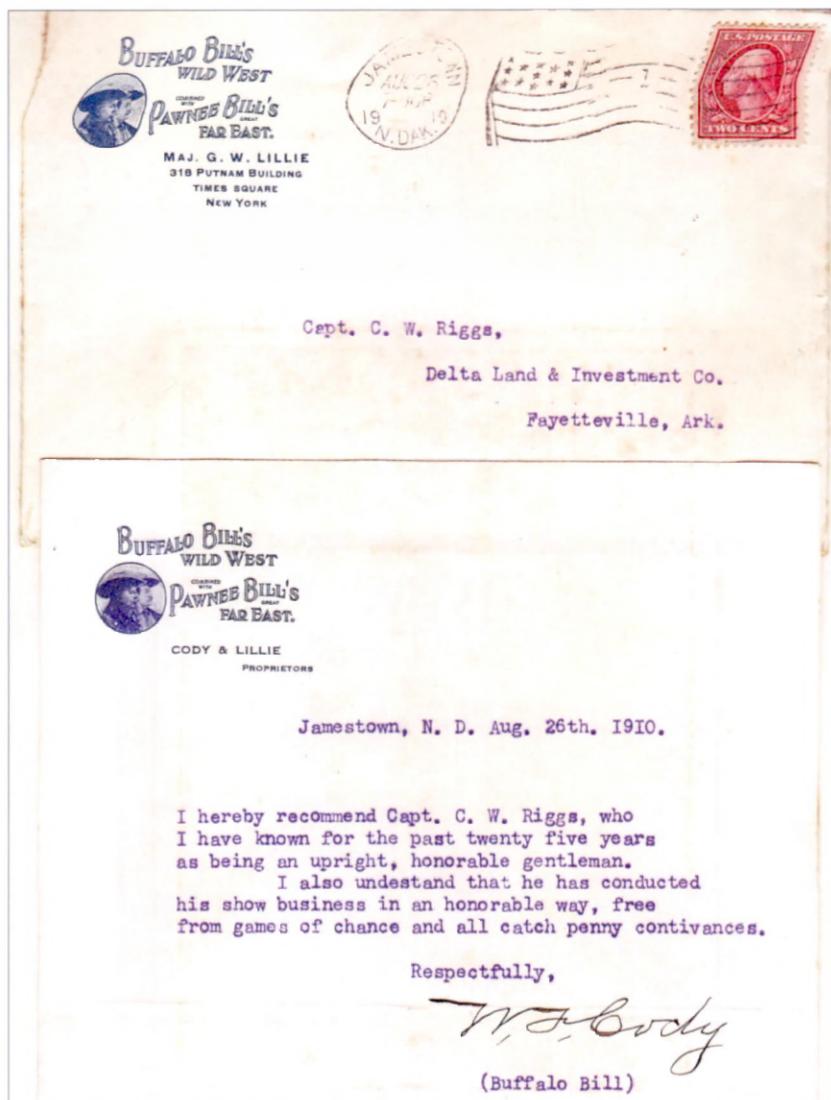
Chauncey Wales Riggs, who went by "C. W. Riggs," was born in 1857 in Washtenaw County, Michigan. He was the son of William Wales Riggs, a farmer, and Rowena Metcalf, his second wife, and had two half-sisters, about 10 years older. In interviews Riggs claimed to "have been a wanderer on the face of the earth since I was seven years old," following "his father across the plains."² While the Riggs family was always found on the Sylvan Township farm in Washtenaw County during each of the Federal censuses, a trip west in 1867, when Riggs was 10 years old, is supported by his father's name on a California voters' register. Experiencing the West in the 1860s, Riggs's future may have been influenced by a frontier life still colored by cowboys and Indians.

As a young man, Riggs received a higher education. He first attended Olivet College in Eaton County, Michigan, from 1873-1877. He is then found as a junior, for the academic year 1879-1880, enrolled in the Department of Law at the University of Michigan, but he did not graduate. In October 1879 Riggs and another young man were arrested and charged with conspiracy to defraud in a mail-order scheme. Under custody he asked to be taken to his par-

ents' house to obtain bail money, and while there he made a daring escape and went into hiding. The case dragged on into June of the following year, although the community seemed disinclined to vigorously pursue it, which suggests that the business may have been viewed as a minor offense escalated by an overzealous prosecutor. Eventually charges were dropped due to insufficient evidence.

In January 1880 Riggs's father suffered a stroke and died. Riggs inherited the family farm and took over management. He also married his first wife, Mary Knauf. The two opened a Boys Farm School, beginning with a dozen students and ambitious plans to expand to 50. Unfortunately, a series of problems – including a fire that destroyed the main building, the couple's divorce, and land foreclosures – closed the school in less than two years. As winter approached in 1884, Riggs and his second wife, Clara Lehr, decided to get a boat and head south to hunt, trap, gather nuts and honey, and explore Indian mounds. Life on a houseboat, along with the Southern custom of bestowing honorary titles, led to Riggs's adoption of "Captain," which followed him throughout his life.

His travels led him down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, taking advantage of what resources he could find and exploring mounds in western Tennessee and Missouri, but



A letter from Buffalo Bill in praise of Capt. Riggs.

Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minnesota

it was in northeast Arkansas where he hit pay dirt. The area in Arkansas that includes the counties of Cross, St. Francis, Poinsett, Arkansas, and Crittenden were filled with mound groups and burial sites that contained beautifully crafted prehistoric pottery. Riggs was one of the earliest, but not only, explorers in the area and for several years worked tirelessly excavating sites. Ultimately he excavated thousands of artifacts from the mounds of northeast Arkansas. Riggs claimed to have excavated 5,000 burials, and museums today hold thousands of the artifacts collected by Riggs in the Southeast, including over 2,000 whole or reconstructed vessels.³

Riggs was not a trained archaeologist and his wholesale looting of mounds and human burials receives condemnation today. But during the time Riggs was active,

archaeology as a profession was in its infancy. Those who would become the "fathers" of American archaeology came from different academic backgrounds, while museums were eager to purchase the collections recovered by explorers like Riggs. Although Riggs chose to become a dealer rather than a museum or college-based archaeologist, the kind of work he did was not condemned at the time, and he straddled the line between professional and amateur work.

Riggs undertook excavations in Arkansas only part of the year and moved his residence and business base as needs required. The first year or two he returned to Detroit, and it was here in 1885 that he probably first met William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody. Riggs was in Detroit in 1885, where he is found in a city directory and where the couple's first son was born. Cody's show played Detroit in September of 1885, and a letter of reference Cody provided to Riggs in 1910 stated that Cody had known Riggs for the past 25 years, putting their first meeting in that year.⁴

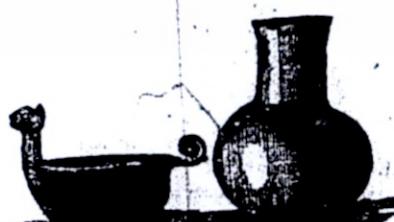
After his work in Arkansas began showing promise, Riggs moved his base to Memphis, but in June 1887 he relocated to Cincinnati, having heard there was a better market for his furs. He was asked by a friend to deliver a message to the editor of the *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, and when Riggs walked in dressed like a frontiersman, he immediately became the center of attention.⁵ As was reported:

No little interest has been excited during the past week by the appearance upon the streets of quite an ideal trapper – a tall man clad in a suit of buckskin, his brown hair falling in loose curls from under a broad sombrero. Upon investigation it was learned that the picturesque personage was not a disciple of the now famous Buffalo Bill, but Mr. C. [W.] Riggs, a very entertaining man and enthusiast upon the subject of the wonderful Mound Builders.⁶

At six feet four inches tall, with flowing hair, mustaches and goatee, Riggs cut quite a figure. Although a frontier style in dress was utilitarian in his fieldwork, he likely was

Mound Builders' Pottery

3,000 YEARS OLD!



We give up our large window this week to a fine exhibit of the ancient pottery of the Mound Builders, as excavated by Mr. C. W. Riggs from the prehistoric mounds of Arkansas and other States. In the side windows are exhibits of the latest modern productions of the potter's art, domestic and foreign. The contrast is striking and instructive.

Clearance Sale of Cups.

We have placed 150 varieties of china cups, ranging in original price from \$8 down, on our Clearance Table. They are to be closed out.

W.H. Glenny, Sons & Co.
251-257 MAIN STREET.

An advertisement in the September 26, 1891 Buffalo Morning Express for a display of Riggs's

also consciously imitating Buffalo Bill. The men at the newspaper quickly taught Riggs the basics of photography and persuaded him to send back photos and letters from his adventures in Arkansas, which were published in subsequent issues. Riggs later published slightly edited versions of the articles in his 1893 book *How We Find Relics*.

This first taste of minor celebrity for Riggs was soon to grow, for the following year Cincinnati was the host city of the Centennial Exposition of the Ohio Valley and Central States,

Riggs displayed his Arkansas prehistoric pottery in the Anthropological Building at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago.

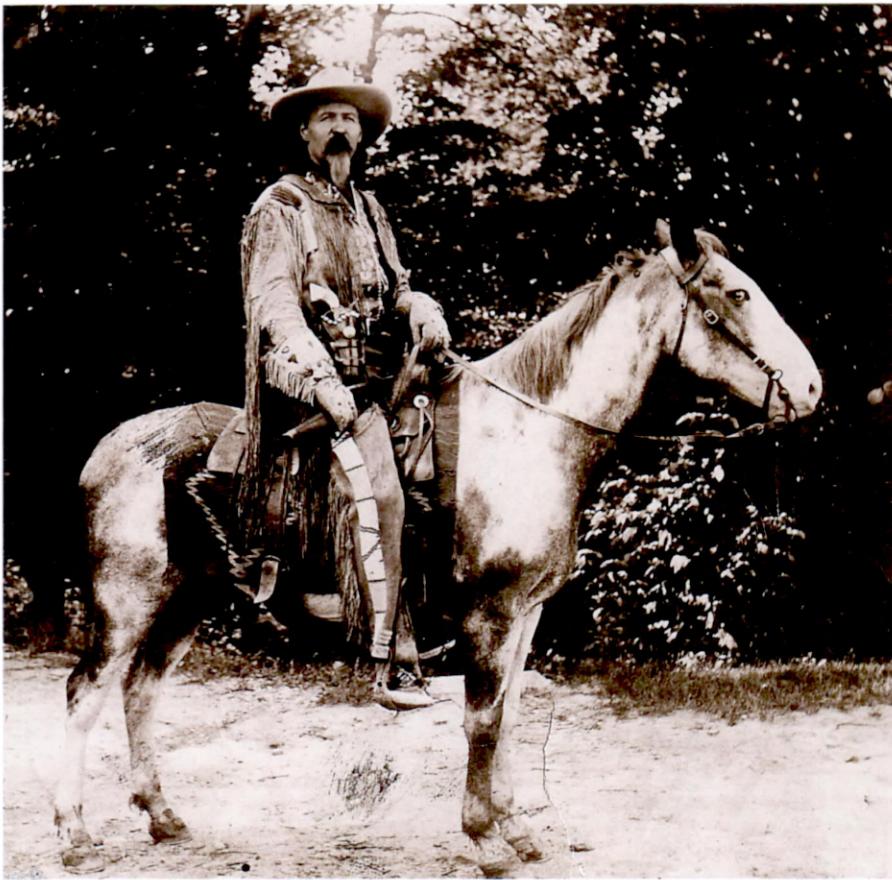
The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

which was to open July 4, 1888, and run 100 days to the end of October. Riggs mounted an exhibit of his Arkansas pottery at the Exposition, and the exposure brought him positive attention from scientists and museum curators, who also purchased collections from Riggs.

In 1889 a large portion of Riggs's collection was purchased by Dr. S. C. Heighway, and the collection was kept on loan at and eventually donated to the Cincinnati Art Museum. Riggs reported that he was paid over \$10,000 for the collection that Heighway purchased, an amount that would be equivalent to over \$255,000 today.⁷ He also took a selection of artifacts to Buffalo, New York, where he sold collections to the Buffalo Historical Society and the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences. Riggs reinvested his new-found wealth in agricultural land in the Arkansas counties where the artifacts were acquired.

In a parallel development in Buffalo, the firm of W. H. Glenny, Sons & Co., a local purveyor of ceramic tablewares, borrowed 100 pieces from the collection to display in their front window, alongside modern wares in the side windows. An advertisement in the paper included an





Capt. C. W. Riggs on horseback.

private collection, Walnut Creek, California

engraved illustration of the prehistoric vessels. The commercial display undoubtedly benefitted both the store and the society by increasing visitation. It was also the first instance of Riggs's collections being offered in a store setting, which in a few years would become his primary venue for sales.⁸

Riggs returned to the Midwest in time to participate in the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, a fabulous and influential world's fair. Although it commemorated the 400th anniversary of Columbus's arrival in the New World, the Exposition ran from May 1 to October 30 of the following year. It showcased the best of everything the world had to offer, from arts to technologies. Riggs again exhibited his Arkansas prehistoric pottery, this time in the Anthropological Building. He received even greater attention, winning a diploma and bronze medal, which he proudly proclaimed on his letterhead. He also sold more of the collection to museums, including the Milwaukee Public Museum and the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago. His asking price to the Field Museum was \$20,000, an amount worth about half a million dollars today, but he settled for \$5,000, equal to about \$135,000 today. The col-

lection consisted of nearly 6,000 artifacts, plus skeletal remains; it is the largest collection of Riggs artifacts held by any museum.

The Columbian Exposition, of course, was also a form of entertainment, and Riggs undoubtedly honed his skills as he showed his exhibit and interacted with other entertainers. The best of those, when it came to the wild west, was Cody. Although he had been refused permission to be part of the Columbian Exposition, Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Congress of Rough Riders of the World set up just outside the gates and was a fabulous success.⁹ Riggs stated some years later that he always saw "the show when it was anywhere near,"¹⁰ so he had plenty of opportunity to mature his friendship with Cody and company.

Despite his success with the Arkansas artifacts, Riggs had begun to change his focus after the Cincinnati Centennial Exposition. His experiences in Chicago solidified that change, as Riggs turned his view to the Southwest.

A Dealer in Indian Curios (1894-1899)

Riggs would have seen the displays of Southwestern Indian artifacts at both the Centennial Exposition and the Columbian Exposition. Flush with money from the artifact sales to museums, and with a desire to escape the malarial lands of Arkansas, a trip west may have been enticing and now affordable. So, in the spring of 1890, Riggs and his family went to Colorado. The Riggs family spent a number of months in Colorado and was still there in August when Clara delivered a son high on Old Baldy Mountain, which led to the boy's unusual name of "Timberline." While Riggs may have done some excavating or exploring in ancient pueblos, he also started purchasing handcrafted items directly from the Indians, returning with Ute and Navajo material.¹¹

In late 1893, after the close of the Columbian Exposition, Riggs returned to the Southwest, this time to New Mexico, establishing a base in Albuquerque. He also ranged into Arizona and Texas. He purchased rugs, pottery, and other handcrafted items directly from the residents of the pueblos, as well as from curio dealers in Santa Fe and elsewhere. Riggs became friendly with members of the Navajo,



C. W. RIGGS' NAVAJO INDIAN ART COLLECTION.

One of Capt. Riggs's displays of Native American artifacts.

reproduced from *Camp Life in the Wilderness*, by Capt. C. W. Riggs, self-published, c. 1897.

Arapahoe, Apache, and Isleta tribes, and even learned to speak some Navajo. He began to style himself as "(Silver Hat), The Navajo Indians Thakist (Friend)."¹² About this time, according to a 1910 letter, Riggs also made acquaintance with Gordon W. "Pawnee Bill" Lillie, indicating his growing interest in Wild West entertainment.¹³

In 1896, having made the transition from explorer to curio dealer, Riggs returned with a large stock of goods and began sales in Kansas City, Missouri, setting up in a hall over the Kansas City Gas Company. One advertisement featured an engraved illustration of a Navajo weaver.¹⁴ About this time Riggs also parted ways with Clara and married Althea Aman, a Chicago woman he had probably met while exhibiting at the Columbian Exposition. He remained in Kansas City until the end of the year, then took his stock and moved east.

In early 1897 Riggs relocated to New York City and rented space at 41-43 University Street. This became his residence and base of business operations, the address appearing on letterhead, although it is not clear if he also used

it as a showroom; it was not named as such in later testimony. Over the next two years, however, Riggs was absent from the address much of the time while operating a series of exhibitions and sales at major department stores in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Providence, and Washington, D. C., with periods lasting one to two months at most of them. Among the stores were John Wanamaker, Joseph G. Darlington & Co., Frederick Loeser & Co., Hutzler Bros., Woodward & Lothrop, and Shepard, Norwell & Co. The use of Native American material culture in home decor, often displayed in areas called "Indian corners," was inspired in part by ideas from the Arts and Crafts Movement.¹⁵ Riggs's collecting and sales fit perfectly with the popular trends of the time, and he was a big draw at the department stores. One ad late in 1897 indicated that "over a million people had visited Capt. Riggs' Navajo Indian Wigwam during his travels through the eastern cities."¹⁶

The stores took out large advertisements in their local papers and often received additional feature stories about the colorful Riggs and his equally colorful Navajo rugs.

Children's Day

Saturday, Nov. 13

Boys and girls, accompanied by their Parents or Teachers, are invited to visit the collection of **Navajo and Pueblo Indian Arts**, gathered by Capt. C. W. Riggs.

This collection consists of **REAL INDIAN TRAPPINGS**, fresh from the Western plains, and presents a wealth of wild, barbaric beauty that suggests Nomadic dreams of the camp fire and the chase. Captain Riggs, when a boy, started life as a hunter and trapper. Pursuit of game and fur animals took him into regions where the Indian trail was ever present, and soon his interest centred in collecting their quaint and curious belongings. His researches have been richly rewarded, as his large exhibition well shows. Capt. Riggs will be present and will personally give an explanation of its history. It is now on exhibition and sale.

SHEPARD, NORWELL & CO
Winter St., Boston, Mass

An advertisement from the November 12, 1897 Boston Evening Transcript inviting children to one of the Native American displays.

Engraved illustrations of Riggs in his frontier attire sometimes accompanied the ads. His billing varied as "Indian Relics and Den Furnishings," "The Great Exhibition," "The Navajo Indian Wigwam," "Barbaric Den," and "Happy Hunting Ground," but by late 1897 Riggs seemed to prefer the "Wigwam."

Riggs also promoted himself through small, illustrated pamphlets and booklets. They were associated with the different department stores, which probably paid for the printing, and were likely sold or given away at the exhibitions. They served as souvenirs, informational pieces and sales catalogs, and can be found today among the holdings of various archives. One of the larger booklets was *Camp Life in the Wilderness*, which repeated some material from Riggs's 1893 book and included a chapter by his wife, Althea Riggs. Althea's chapter was also published separately as *Among the Indians: A Unique Life in the Saddle and About the Camp Fire*.¹⁷

While sales were the prime purpose, the exhibition also offered entertainment value, as did Riggs himself. An advertisement by Shepard, Norwell & Co. of Boston promoted Children's Day on November 13, 1897, in which "Boys and girls, accompanied by their Parents or Teachers, are invited to visit the collection of Navajo and Pueblo Indian Arts, gathered by Capt. C. W. Riggs," and to view "real Indian trappings, fresh from the Western plains." The ad assured that "Capt. Riggs will be present and will personally give an explanation of its history."¹⁸ Hosting school groups continued over the years, as a 1901 thank-you letter from Father O'Reilly of St. Ann's Rectory, New York, attests: "Just a line to thank you for the kind reception you tendered the boys and myself at your Wigwam. The little fellows were delighted with their afternoon. You have completely captured their hearts."¹⁹

As the 19th century drew to a close, Riggs's interests were again shifting, not abandoning but growing out of what he had already been doing. His interests in the material culture of American Indians involved him in the romance of the Wild West, and his exhibitions and sales were evolving into a form of entertainment that placed him as a feature attraction. He already had contacts with some of the big names in Wild West entertainment. Now located in New York City, Riggs was in the very heart of America's entertainment industry. He saw opportunity around him and he was ready to take advantage of it.

Exhibitions Under Canvas (1899-1905)

Beginning in 1899 and over the next six years, Riggs opened and closed several companies and dabbled in entertainment ventures of various sorts, while gradually moving away from curio dealing as a full-time occupation. While on the department store circuit, Riggs continued to promote sales of his Southwestern collections to eastern museums. A series of letters was exchanged with Franklin N. Hooper of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts & Sciences, beginning in late 1897 and continuing to 1902, detailing sales and shipping information. In December 1898, however, Riggs offered to sell the large collection, then on display at the Institute, with the "intention of closing out my entire collection, of every name or nature, and changeing [sic] my business entirely." By late February 1899, Riggs explained: "I have recently incorporated a Stock Company to give exhibitions under canvas next summer, and I need every dollar I can gather together to invest in advertising matter."²⁰

Riggs was also gathering resources on the personal level. In April of that year, Riggs and his mother, who was living in Ohio, abducted his 8-year-old son, Timberline, from school in Oberlin, Ohio, where Clara and the children were living.²¹ Riggs's relationship with his former wives and children is murky. He fathered a dozen children with five different women (not all of whom he was legally married to at the time) and named all 11 survivors in his will. Writings and letters seemed to indicate that he was fond of children. Yet, when his wives left him, they moved far away, remarried, and often changed the names of the children, either to hide them from their father or because he was no longer involved with them. Of all of them, only Timberline (who was called Clarence by his mother) would have a long-term relationship and know his father as an adult. The feeling among descendants is that Timberline was his father's favorite, but whether that was because of a personal affinity or the romance of the son's name and circumstance of birth, nicely marketable in Wild West entertainment, is unknown.

In October 1899 Riggs incorporated the Riggs Co., identified as being in general show business. His letterhead of the same date, however, advertised the Riggs Co. as "Riggs' Rough Riders...a Band of Expert Buyers Male and Female, in every line," who would get to auction and fire sales, and supply wanted merchandise at bargain prices. Riggs played up the connection to the Rough Riders as the "Rocky Mountain Rangers...who went up the hill at San Juan," but the name had an even earlier connection with Cody's show.

The Riggs Co. appears to have served as a catch-all for several ventures, this being only the first. It lasted until 1904, when the corporation certificate was voided after two years of unpaid taxes. Also in October, Riggs sent a letter to J. H. Gest of the Cincinnati Art Museum, which had been serving as a warehouse for his collections, asking that the artifacts be sent to him at the University Place address on the letterhead. Riggs told Gest: "I have probably located here permanently. I have a nice large salesroom." The salesroom, which may have been in operation for only a year or two, likely was located on the west side of Broadway between 29th and 30th Streets, as identified in later testimony. Riggs also continued with land purchases in Arkansas, incorporating Wales-Riggs Plantations to manage his agricultural business.²²

Riggs continued to interact with the company from Buffalo Bill's Wild West whenever they were in town. During this period, Riggs testified, groups of four to a dozen Indians from the show would visit the shop. While the Indians were not allowed to sell curios on the lot, Riggs noted that they would sell commercial articles made around Santa Fe when they were away from the show.²³

At the dawn of a new century, Riggs aimed for a big splash. In March 1900 Riggs ran an advertisement in the *New York Clipper* seeking "circus people in all branches" for a new venture he was calling "The Riggs Co.'s Great Railroad Shows, Circus, Museum, and Trained Animal Exposition." He was seeking tumblers, riders, novelty acts, musicians, performing animals, freaks and curiosities, as well as ticket sellers, food sales, and people to handle advertising. Riggs also was offering to buy train cars and circus property of all kinds. A letterhead dated just days after the ad announced The Riggs Co.'s Great Railroad Shows in a color banner, with engraved images of Riggs as president of the company and H. W. (Henry) Link as general manager. Link was a circus agent, business manager and railroad contractor who worked with various outfits. The University Place address was given as headquarters. Aside from these two intriguing pieces, nothing more has been found on this venture. What appears to be big plans may have been largely speculative and ultimately unfulfilled. If Riggs was operating a railroad show of any kind at this time, he was not advertising it nor showing it in the route list.²⁴

After six months without another word, however, a new ad appeared in the *Clipper*, under the Riggs Company name, seeking performers for a production called "Down on the Farm." Rehearsals were to begin in late September. The following month the *Clipper* reported that the show

CLASS A. 15 CENTS PER FT.

CLASS B. 12 CENTS PER FT.

EDISON

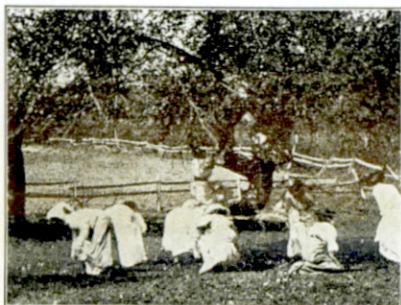
Films and Projecting Kinetoscopes

Exhibition Model, \$115.00.

Universal Model, \$75.00.

CLASS A--LATEST FEATURE SUBJECTS.

DOWN ON THE FARM



No. 6,214. Code VATERARM. Length 440ft. A \$66.00.

JUST OUT. A BIG HIT. SHIPMENTS FROM STOCK.
ILLUSTRATED CIRCULAR, NO. 270, MAILED FREE ON APPLICATION.

EVERYBODY WORKS BUT FATHER

No. 6,221. Code VATERLOS. Length 350ft. A \$52.50.

Another Weekly Hit. Strictly Up to Date. You'll Miss it if You Overlook This One.

The picture opens with a laughable "Jumble" announcement—a new feature, exclusively Edison, mysterious and novel to a degree. The first scene shows Mother and all the children hurriedly eating breakfast and rushing off to work. Mother calls Father repeatedly, but gets no reply. The next scene shows Father in bed. His slumbers are disturbed by a horrible dream. In his dream, which appears as a vision, he is seen carrying the hod up a ladder. He gets into an argument with a bricklayer, who throws him off the scaffold and pelts him with bricks, which he tries to dodge. Suddenly he wakes and finds his wife standing beside his bed with a cup of coffee. The next scene shows Mother and Daughter working in the kitchen. Father enters with his shoes in his hand and sits down by the fire to smoke. Mother sends him out for wood. Father is next seen by the wood-pile, hiring a man to chop the wood, while he sits down and puts on a pair of blinder, so he cannot see the man work. Presently Mother comes along and the man shows her the big pile of wood he has chopped. Mother gives the man a glass of beer and carries the wood into the house. The next scene shows a carpet on a line. Father, instead of beating it, crawls into it. Mother and Daughter now start in to beat the carpet, and Father gets covered with dust and a good beating before they discover him. The final scene shows Father seated in a chair in the kitchen. Mother and Daughter are washing. Father's chair gets caught in some clothes in the wringer, and he is thrown to the floor and the entire contents of the wash tub pours over him, and he is almost smothered in the suds.

CLASS B--LATEST FEATURE SUBJECTS.

THE CZAR AT CZARKOE SENO

No. 6,217. Code VATERHAUS. Length 385ft. B \$46.20.

Religious and Military Exercises, Giving a Very Close View of the Russian Ruler.

SEND FOR LATEST CATALOGS AND ILLUSTRATED CIRCULARS.

EDISON MANUFACTURING CO.,

MAIN OFFICE and FACTORY, ORANGE, N. J.
Chicago Office, 304 Wabash Avenue.

New York Office, 31 Union Square. Cable Address, Kurlian, New York.

OFFICE FOR UNITED KINGDOM: 25 CLERKENWELL ROAD, LONDON, E. C., ENGLAND.

SELLING AGENTS: THE KINETOGRAPH CO., PETER BACIGALUPI, 41 E. 21st St., New York. 786-788 Mission St., San Francisco, Cal.

had opened at Mt. Vernon, New York, on September 29. The roster included 27 players, plus band director Fred De Villa Fox, orchestra leader George Donnelly, advance man Harry Allen, and manager H. W. Link. In November *The Billboard* reported that "H. W. Link is doing well with 'Down on the Farm.' The show has played to uniformly good business ever since it opened at Mt. Vernon, N.Y., and Capt. Riggs is very well pleased with his venture."²⁵

The route list for "Down on the Farm" appeared regularly in the *Clipper*. They played mostly one-night stands from September 29, 1900, to January 29, 1901, throughout New York, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and Virginia. At that point it appears that Riggs and Link ended their involvement with the show and each other. In March a new ad was placed, again seeking musicians and performers for "Down on the Farm," with Charles Manley of Nyack, New York, as the contact. The show toured in April and May under the management of Manley and Dan Emerson, and then no further ads or routes are found. Four years later, however, the Edison Manufacturing Co. offered "Down on the Farm" as a feature film, so the production must have had a continued life.²⁶

In the meantime, at the end of 1900, Riggs continued to explore new ventures. He incorporated the Riggs Curio Co. in late October, its purpose being to manufacture and deal in curios. It was only in existence 3½ months, before being dissolved in February 1901.²⁷

Edison's film of Down on the Farm was advertised in the November 25, 1908 New York Clipper.

Circus World Museum

In December 1900 Riggs placed a small ad in the classifieds of the New York papers seeking female employees. The ad read: "Stenographer—Remington, accurate in figures, girls other positions. All must have red hair. Capt. Riggs, Indian Curiosity and Navajo Blanket Co., 41 University Place." Sounding like something out of the Sherlock Holmes story "The Red-Headed League," the mention of hair color caught the attention of a sharp-eyed reporter or editor, and a short follow-up story appeared on December 15. Riggs told the reporter he favored redheads, because "I think they are brighter. They take hold better, and I like to see them about me, too."²⁸

Probably without conscious intention, Riggs had hit on a hook that caught the public's fancy. The story was picked up by newspapers and reprinted all over the country. It was such a good hook that Riggs would continue to advertise for red-haired girls for all his other ventures, including his Wild West show. The ads, as well as more-detailed stories, continued for years into the future. Riggs did seem to have a thing for redheads, and hints suggest that all his wives were probably redheaded. But there was an uncomfortable suggestion of fetishism as well; Riggs began to request that locks of hair be sent with job applications, and one later article noted that Riggs had an unusual collection of the red-haired locks.²⁹

It is unknown what Riggs did during the first three-quarters of 1901, as he was not advertising, but considering later developments, he might have set up the Wigwam as a side attraction at a summer amusement park. By September Riggs had rented a new place at 138 E. 14th Street in New York.³⁰ This was in the area around Union Square, at the time the heart of New York's theater district. His business was located three doors from the Dewey Theater, a venue for vaudeville, burlesque and silent films, and opposite the famous Tony Pastor's, which was located in the same building as Tammany Hall. Other venues along the block during or around the time of Riggs's occupation included Jacob Abraham's bookstore, the Gramercy Gym, Huber's Dime Museum, and Luchow's German Restaurant. Immediately next door, although a few years after Riggs had left the area, the building held the fabulous Theatre Unique, which began as a penny arcade and vaudeville theater, but earned renown as one of the first places to project films.

Riggs had in mind operating the 14th Street venue as a winter arcade with booths to rent. He ran an ad in the *Clipper* in early September announcing: "Attention, Boys. It is time to get back to New York. We have a home for the winter for you in Riggs' Wigwam.... Riggs' wigwam

SLOT MACHINE HEADQUARTERS.
We manufacture, buy, sell, place, exchange and repair anything in the market, new or second hand. We have many machines that actually pay 20 per cent. each week on the investment. Write for terms and price list. RIGGS AMUSEMENT COMPANY, 41 and 43 University Place, New York City.



Riggs was advertising his slot machines in the January 3, 1903 New York Clipper.

is a palace of original attractions, arranged to please, in a large building 20 by 160 feet. No experiment, but a proven success. The walls to the ceiling are hung with Riggs' Vast Collection of Indian Curiosities.... Added to this are music specialties and Indians. Brilliantly lighted with electric lights. Kept comfortable with furnace heat.... Forty booths for rent, of five feet front each. Open now.... Girls with red hair wanted. Twenty positions in Riggs' Wigwam."³¹

On another page of the same issue, Riggs advertised his desire to buy a "large orchestrion," a mechanical device with pipes and percussion played by a cylinder or music roll. He also wanted museum features and special attractions. A week later he ran another ad seeking Indian birch bark and bead workers.³² Besides Riggs' Wigwam, he also advertised under Riggs' Mercantile Co., and Indian Curiosity and Navajo Blanket Co. mentioned above, but none were official corporations. Instead, they were probably working names for activities under Riggs Amusement Co., which he incorporated in September 1901 and which likely replaced the earlier Riggs Co. Its purpose was listed as dealing in Indian curios, but it probably served as a catch-all for multiple entertainment activities, as had the earlier company. It remained in existence until 1911.³³

Riggs had not even been operating for a month when he suffered a financial set-back after the 14th Street business was burgled. He lost several Indian blankets, worth \$300 a piece, and a buckskin coat formerly owned by Chief Red Cloud, as well as cash from a locked trunk for a total loss of about \$2,000. This amount would be worth about \$55,000 today.³⁴ Riggs' Wigwam and arcade on 14th Street remained in business for only eight months, until April 1902. By the spring of that year, he was on to another venture.

Riggs was still negotiating with Franklin Hooper of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences for the sale of the collection they had been exhibiting since 1897. With his new venture in mind, Riggs needed ready cash, so in April 1902 he offered to take \$1,200, considerably less than he

wanted, if Hooper could have the cash to him by July 1. Riggs was willing to discount it even more for a May 1 payment. As he explained: "I am changing my business and going out of curios entirely and If I can get the amount named by the 1st of May or the 1st of June, I can invest it, so it will certainly make me the amount I have offered to discount to you and besides it will give me a better chance for all of the coming season which with my business, opens the fore part of May."³⁵

This new business, still under the Riggs Amusement Co. name, produced, sold and placed gaming machines of various sorts at summer amusement parks, arcades, and gaming parlors. A second letter to Franklin Hooper on May 10 further explained that his "busy season has already begun and to make the machines earn money, they should all be bought and placed at watering places by the 1st to the 15th of June. You understand the seasons at the watering places," he continued, "when they begin and when they close and that is the time that we make the most money in the new business I have ventured in."³⁶

On the same May date as the letter, Riggs ran an ad in the *Clipper* describing Riggs Amusement Co. as "Slot Machine Headquarters." He listed a wide variety of machines he was interested in: "We Manufacture, Buy, Sell, Place or Exchange Anything in the Market, New and Second Hand. For Sale, Electric Self-Playing Orchestrions, Banjos, Pianos, Chime Bell Machines, Wiseman's Candle Lung Tester, Electric Gun, Hoover's Name Plate, Punching Bags; Electric Batteries, Bowling Allies, Peanut, Candy, Gum, Weighing, Perfume, Microscope, Strikers, Phonographs, Pictures, Fighting and other Machines." He offered to furnish complete slot machine parlors and wanted new machines to patent and promote. Riggs added an engraved portrait of himself in a broad-brimmed hat, which made his ad stand out among many others.³⁷

In January 1903 Riggs incorporated a new business, Riggs Machine Circuit. Its stated purpose was to give shows and manufacture Indian blankets and other items, but from the name, it was clearly involved with the slot machine business. In the same month, a short note appeared in the periodical *Fibre and Fabric*, a publication of the cotton and woolen textile industry, which noted: "Riggs Machine Circuit, of East Orange, N. J., incorporated to manufacture Indian blankets, etc. Capital, \$100,000; incorporators, Chauncey Riggs, Everett W. French and Walter F. Springsteen." Nothing more is heard of it. The corporation remained in business for four years, until March 1907, when the certificate was voided for non-payment of taxes.³⁸

The ads for Riggs Amusement Co. dealing in various

gaming machines continued on a regular basis from May 1902 through the next two years, varying a bit from time to time, as Riggs offered to buy and sell equipment. In March 1903 he wanted name plate machines; in June he offered to sell Hoover's Name Plates; in August he offered gum machines and others at a sacrifice to close an estate; in October he offered 50 picture machines from \$8-\$20, as well as punching bags. He also continued to advertise for red-haired girls for his clerical and office staff, which led to additional articles in the papers, including one with a photo of Riggs surrounded by a drawing of lovely ladies.³⁹

In February 1904 Riggs's ad offered "job lot slot machines" and listed a variety of what he had available: "18 Rosenfield Picture, 13 Roovers' Name Plates, 60 Electric Batteries; 226 Candy Machines, 7 Punching Bags, 2 Uncle Sams, 1 Bowling Alley, 2 Hit the Coons, 1 Combination, 2 Lifters, 1 Grip, 5 Gum, 2 Peanut, 1 Klondyke, 1 Envelope, 5 Miscellaneous"—a total of 142 machines for \$1,200. He also offered to furnish complete parlors on commission and especially wanted parlors in Kentucky and Tennessee. In March he announced 400 machines just received, to be sold at one-third cost. In April he advertised Victoria Picture Machines and Wizard Fortune Tellers.⁴⁰

As he continued with the gaming machines, however, Riggs was again beginning to shift his focus. An ad appeared in the *Clipper* in August 1903 in which he stated that Riggs's Wigwam, under canvas, would be heading south for the winter. He promised a season of a full 52 weeks. Riggs was seeking joint attractions, musicians and performers, and desired a variety of privileges to rent, including a cane rack, knife board, fortune teller, and others. He also wanted 20 red-haired girls. And for the first time he mentioned a desire for poles for a Wild West canopy. Clearly this ad marks his first plans for organizing a traveling Wild West show. A month later he ran another ad seeking cowboys and Indians, and promised a "long season South." But the remainder of his ads in 1903 and early 1904 were for the gaming machines and gave his New York address. It does not appear that Riggs went south that winter.⁴¹

The gaming machine ads in early 1904, however, with their discounted prices and volume sales suggest that Riggs was trying to transition into a new business venture. His specific mention of wanting gaming parlors in Kentucky and Tennessee also indicates he was eyeing the South. In May 1904, Riggs's ad in the *Clipper* again offered slot machines at reduced prices, but this time he offered to "exchange for horses or show property."⁴²

In August 1904 his efforts to pull together a traveling tent show ramped up again. An ad appeared in the *Clip-*

per on August 6: "Wanted at Once, Palmist, Photographer, Knife Board and Japanese Ball Game for season at Asbury Park. Work on percentage or rental. Absolutely the best location in city. The Old Mill and Shoot the Shoots, after Sept. 15 South for Winter. Riggs' Wigwam all year round. A success."⁴³ Asbury Park was a popular New Jersey seaside resort with hotels and all sorts of entertainment and amusement features. In the first years of the 20th century, the population swelled to 200,000 during the summer months. Riggs gave his address as Avon, New Jersey.

Three more ads in the *Clipper* were placed at weekly intervals in August. The August 13 ad asked: "After Labor Day Where Do You Go? Riggs' Wigwam Wants Sober, reliable people...for an extended trip South, West, Northwest and back. Two years solid. Doubling B. and O. given preference. Advance Agent, Circus Acts, Outside Attractions, Cowboys, Canvas Men." Riggs gave an Asbury Park address. The August 20 and 27 ads wanted "Outside Attract-

tions" and repeated the two-year plan through the South and West.⁴⁴

Then there was silence until December, when Riggs's ad carried a Columbia, South Carolina, address. "Wanted at Once," the ad announced, "Photographer with Outfit, Good Man with Jewelry Spindle, Three Palmists, A Shooting Gallery Man with Outfit. Rare opportunity year round. Other privileges write. Will buy Jewelry Spindle, also Wheel of Fortune." The ad appeared again the following week.⁴⁵

Then that was it for almost a year. Riggs was in the South, but there were no more advertisements to let us know what he was doing. He did not appear under the list of Tent Shows' Winter Quarters, published by the *Clipper* in 1905, nor in their Directory of Tent Show People. So what was Riggs doing?

Riggs was busy in the years from 1899 to 1905, and he clearly was involved, in one form or another, with the entertainment industry. Yet his specific ventures varied



This circa 1895 poster printed by Hoen, heralded Buffalo Bill's Wild West, the best known and most widely traveled of the Wild West shows.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

considerably from producing a traveling stage show to purveying gaming machines, with Indian curio sales continuing in the Wigwam throughout. Riggs advertised when he needed to, but more often in the off-season, when he not only explored new ventures but also incorporated his various businesses. His relative silence during the summer season (May-September) suggests that he might have set up the Wigwam at nearby seaside resorts, although I have not yet found evidence one way or the other, except for the 1904 stint at Asbury Park. Placed in such a location, however, he would have continued to make contacts and build a network leading to his plans for a traveling show.

As early as 1900, with his ad and letterhead for the Riggs Co.'s Great Railroad Shows, etc., Riggs had ambitious plans. He tried again in 1903 and 1904, with promises in his ads of taking a touring company through the South and West. Yet time and again, these plans seemed to fade. Were the advertisements simply speculative? A way to test the waters and see what sort of response he would get? Or did the realities of organizing a traveling show – with all its equipment, livestock, performers and crew – just take more time to gather than he anticipated? From his August 1903 ad announcing a touring show to the South, Riggs would take over two years to accomplish it.

In August 1903 Riggs had set his sights for the South. In December 1904 he was in South Carolina. Perhaps he used 1905 to set things in motion. In late October 1905 Riggs arrived in Augusta, Georgia, ready to organize his Wild West show.

BE WISE! BOOK NOW!

We want to hear from Managers of One, Two, Three Night, Week Stands and Repertoire Companies looking for good time balance of this or next Season.

MR. SPENCER H. CONE has full charge of our booking department. If you have the show he can fill the time for you. For particulars address

HENRY BELMAR AMUSEMENT CO.,
Knickerbocker Theatre Building, 1402 Broadway, Suite 606-7, N. Y.

WANTED QUICK FOR
RIGGS' ROUGH RIDERS WILD WEST AND HISTORICAL FRONTIER EXHIBITION,
Band Leader and people to double B. and O. or complete band. Advertising Agent back with show.
Boss Canvas Man, Ten more Bill Posters, Cow Boys, Cook.

FOR SIDE SHOW--Ladies' Band, Musical Team. Other Side Show people write.

WANT SCOTCH BAG PIPES.

PRIVILEGES—Candy, Slot Machines and all other legitimate. Transportation and accommodations first class in our own train of palace sleeping cars.
H. SYLVESTER and DOC CHRISTIAN, write. State all first letter.

RIGGS AMUSEMENT CO., Capt. C. W. RIGGS, Pres., 2025 Walton Way, Augusta, Ga.

DOROTHY LEWIS CO.

Wants Full Acting Company,

Including: Soubrette or Ingenue with specialties. General Business Man, Character Man, also Property Man for bits and specialties, one with machine preferred. Good wardrobe essential. Gentlemen must have square cuts. Balance of season and Summer. Long engagement to right people. Do not misrepresent. Incompetents dismissed after first rehearsal. Tickets to those known. Write or wire.

A. H. BLOCK, Manager, Week March 26, Toronto, O.; week April 2, Charleroi, Pa.

The March 31, 1906 New York Clipper included Riggs's ad seeking Rough Riders and other performers.

Riggs' Wild West (1905-1909)

On November 14, 1905, the *Augusta Chronicle* announced "Buffalo Bill" Man in City Organizing a Wild West Show." The short article explained that Riggs had established winter quarters on the Eldorado Farm, with plans to give his first performance in March of the following year. His small group included a string of western horses, a number of performing dogs, "five young women, a full-blooded Indian and several cowboys," with others expected. Riggs was now touting himself as a once-famous Indian scout and a former manager of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, neither of which were true but added to the draw of his show.⁴⁶

That very morning, however, tragedy struck when a fire consumed the barns and stables on the Eldorado Farm. Believed to be arson, the fire destroyed, in addition to the buildings, 150 tons of hay, threshing machines and other farm implements, and Riggs's 20 trained horses, just sparing the houses and tents. Riggs and company helped fight the blaze, but little could be done to stop it. The report described the "squeals of terror and pain" of the horses, which "brought tears to the eyes of the spectators." Riggs's loss amounted to \$8,000 (worth over \$200,000 today), but his affection for the horses left him heartbroken.⁴⁷

Season 1906. While the fire was a setback that would delay Riggs's opening date, it did not stop him. By March 1906 he was advertising in both the *Billboard* and *Clipper* for personnel, side shows and privileges for Riggs' Rough Riders Wild West and Historical Frontier Exhibition – a

mouthful of a name for his show. He was seeking everything: band members, canvas men, bill posters, cowboys, cooks, and an advertising agent. He highlighted the desire for players of Scottish bag pipes and offered first-class accommodations in his "own train of palace sleeping cars."⁴⁸

Riggs sent a note on the show to the *Clipper's* "Under the Tents" column, which appeared on April 7. It noted that the Wild West show and exhibition was part of the incorporated Riggs Amusement Co. His account was glowing:

Everything is on the move at our Winter quarters at Augusta, GA. Fourteen cars arrived Saturday, March 24, from Camden, N. J., all being sixty feet long and all

new. Our No. 1 advertising car, which is also new, will arrive from the railroad shops in Augusta on April 2. The paper is all special. The No. 1 car will carry fifteen bill posters, lithographers, programmers and banner men. No cooking will be done on the car, as all live at the best hotels. Going into our Winter quarters you will find painters, decorators and wood workers putting on the finishing touches on everything in their line. Our opening day will find this show as bright as a new milled dollar. Our tent canopy is 25x300, dressing tent a fifty feet round top, house tent. We have fifty head of horses and ponies, and thirty wagons. Characters of all nations of today, and historical and mythological characters, beautiful and elaborate trappings and wardrobe will greatly add to the free street show. All new waterproof tents will be used. Our side show will be one of the biggest ever put up with a Wild West, and will be under the management of W. C. Homer. Our frontier exhibition will consist of a genuine band of Navajo Indians, fifty in all; cowboys, frontiersmen, cowgirls, scouts, trappers, hunters and guides, forming groups which should prove of great interest to all. The exhibition will take place in the big Wild West arena. The engagements for this frontier exhibition are now almost complete, and include some of the best and most skilled in the Wild West line. Our fancy rifle shot experts, ropers and bronco busters are all high class, and it is safe to predict that April 27 and 28 will see the big Wild West ready, opening at Augusta, Ga. Then for the road, into South Carolina, Georgia, Tennessee, West Virginia, Virginia, Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Kentucky, then South into Florida for the winter.⁴⁹

But, was Riggs's show actually this big, or was this another speculative, wishful promotion intended to attract personnel? Over the three years that the show operated, only a few people would be mentioned by name as being associated with the show, nowhere near the 50-plus noted above, although many of those would be support personnel not attractions. When Riggs was ready to sell the outfit, he owned only two railroad cars, although he may have rented others as needed. And his ambitious route into 11 states does not match what is known of his actual route from 1906 of seven states. So, perhaps, Riggs's enthusiastic description contains some truth, but much exaggeration.

Riggs continued to advertise in the *Clipper* and *Billboard*, and even in the *Augusta Chronicle*, for personnel, equipment and livestock. In the very same issue as the above report, an ad was placed again seeking a range of people and privileges, as well as old route books. Riggs also stated that the show was "without a dollar in debt," but less than two weeks later a brief in the *Augusta Chronicle* stated that an attachment had been made against some of the livestock of the show, certainly suggesting otherwise. The *Billboard* reported on April 14 that Riggs had been in St. Louis buying horses for the show and reported on April 21 that he was at the National Stock Yards buying a fine selection of "spotted bronchos," enough to "complete three carloads of bronchos in addition to a carload recently purchased at the Kansas City Stock Yards." His prize purchase was a unique pair of spotted Arabian mules, for which he paid \$1,500.⁵⁰

Riggs' Wild West was scheduled to open April 27, 1906, in Augusta, Georgia, so he was cutting it close with acquiring new livestock, but that was not the worst of his problems. The day the show was to open, Riggs was denied use of the lot on which the company had rehearsed and the location advertised. In the old parlance, however, the show must go on, and at the last minute another venue was secured.⁵¹

Riggs ran advertisements in the local papers hyping the show. He promised educated dogs and horses, cowboys and cowgirls, Indians and bronco busters, a parade and "new features never before present in your city" to the people of Augusta. A large ad in the Greensboro, Georgia, paper announced that the show was "coming in its warlike splendor." There were "no sweltering hot tents," but instead a covered grandstand, and "excursions on all railroads" to bring patrons to the show. In Marietta, Georgia, Riggs promised a "new, unique, instructive, educational" show, with "each contestant a champion in himself." There were "runners, wrestlers, football players, leapers, vaulters, riders and ropers," plus "chiefs, warriors, all-day runners, bareback riders, wild men of the plains and prairies and their indispensable medicine men."⁵²

As Riggs' Wild West headed out on the road for the next seven months, ads continued to appear in the *Clipper* and *Billboard* seeking a variety of acts and personnel. In April Riggs was looking for a slim, six-foot-tall singer, as well as a gypsy camp. In May he wanted roping and shooting features to "strengthen" the show, as well as "strong circus acts." In June he advertised for riders, tumblers, singing clowns and "team second sight and snakes" to play the parks and fairs he was booking for up to four-week stands.



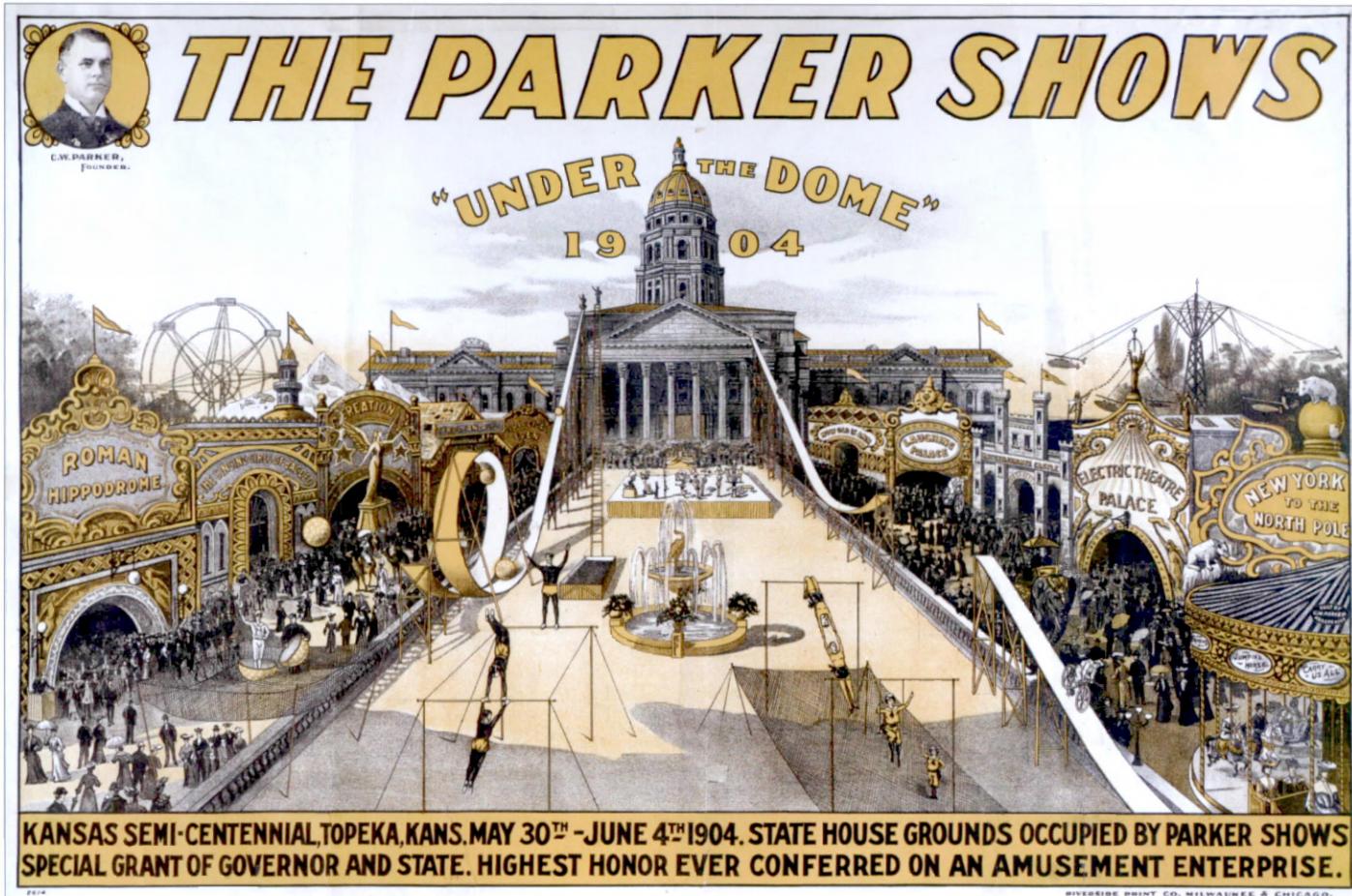
The Cleveland Leader ran this portrait of Colonel Riggs as well as the photograph of Chief Buckskin Charlie and Family on June 10, 1906.

By the fall he wanted four- and six-horse drivers, singing and talking clowns, and ground and aerial acts.⁵³

Some of the leading personnel of Riggs' Wild West were named in newspaper stories or notes that appeared in the entertainment weeklies. W. E. Holmes, formerly a manager of side shows with the Cole & Rogers Circus, had signed on as superintendent in early April. His wife, Leota, brought her lion act. In the *Clipper's* Directory of Tent Show People, which appeared in July, Thomas Alton was named as contracting agent and Charles Beldin had joined the band. In summer newspaper articles, performers mentioned, although sometimes under stage names, included Chief Buckskin Charlie and his family, Chief Wounded Buffalo, Wild Eagle, Arizona Harry, as well as Theo McSpadden, performing lasso, and George Elser, champion trick rider. In November a note in both the *Clipper* and *Billboard* touted recent additions to the show: Annie Schaefer, champion bucking horse rider, William Dillingham, holding the world's record for roping and tying a steer in the shortest time, Buffalo Vernon, formerly featured in Cummins Wild West and Indian Congress in St. Louis, and C. F. Sharp (or Challe) and wife, and J. C. House, who had joined the band.⁵⁴

Among those mentioned above, Annie Schaefer (or Shaffer) rode a bronco at the Fort Smith, Arkansas, rodeo in 1896, and later rode in Cody's show, being among the earliest female bronc-riders. Buffalo Vernon is shown in a photograph in the collection of the University of Oregon wrestling a steer at the Round-Up, Pendleton, Oregon, in 1910.⁵⁵

Riggs' Wild West spent its first six weeks on the road playing one-night stands mostly in Georgia and into Tennessee, before arriving at Lincoln Park in Cleveland, Ohio, for a likely several-week stand. A story in the *Cleveland Leader* included a photo of Riggs, sporting long wavy hair and full mustaches and another of Chief Buckskin Charlie with probably his wife and daughter. The article, however, was full of promotional hokum. Now called "Colonel," Riggs was said to have retired from the U. S. Army, had established a place in Wyoming called "Riggs' Gulch," and had served as a scout – now one of the few survivors – of the wagon train annihilated during the famous Mountain Meadows Massacre in Utah. Although the paper stated the massacre occurred in 1870, in fact, it had occurred in 1857, the year Riggs was born. The massacre, of course, was to be reenacted as a feature of the show.⁵⁶



KANSAS SEMI-CENTENNIAL, TOPEKA, KANS. MAY 30TH - JUNE 4TH 1904. STATE HOUSE GROUNDS OCCUPIED BY PARKER SHOWS
SPECIAL GRANT OF GOVERNOR AND STATE. HIGHEST HONOR EVER CONFERRED ON AN AMUSEMENT ENTERPRISE.

RIVERSIDE PRINT CO. MILWAUKEE & CHICAGO.

For a period in 1906, C. W. Riggs's show was included in Charles W. Parker's traveling carnivals. This 1904 Riverside Print poster gives an idea of Parker's midway.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

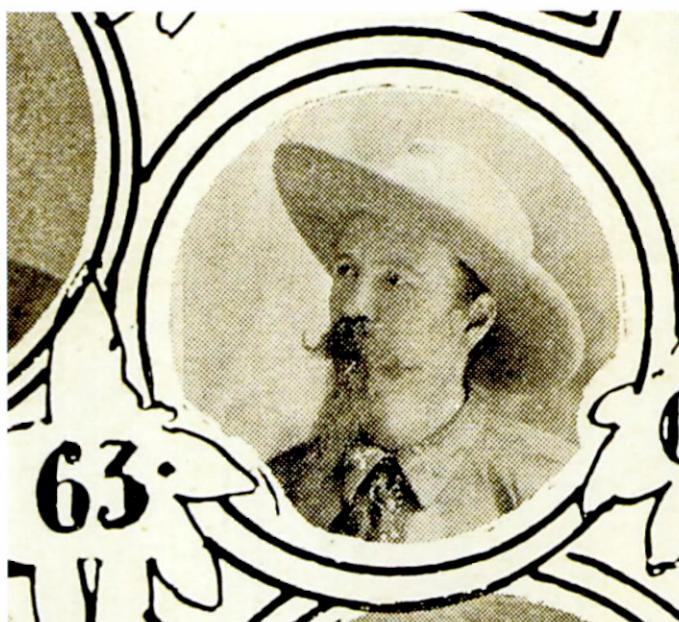
By July Riggs' Wild West had become a feature, called "North America," of the New Parker Amusement Company. Newspaper articles from Chillicothe, Missouri, described the bronco busting, lasso and trick-riding skills, and chaos of the "attack of the prairie schooner." Riggs and company traveled with Parker Amusement through July and August, playing towns in Missouri and Iowa.⁵⁷

In early September, however, a disagreement between Riggs and employees of the Parker company led to a melee and a parting of the ways. Riggs' Wild West had been guaranteed \$300 per week by the Parker company, but on September 6, while in Webster City, Iowa, Riggs found his take \$146 short, due to a counter-claim for damages and salaries claimed by the general manager. Unable to come to an agreement, Riggs decided to separate, just as the trainmaster loaded up the Wild West tent and started off with it. Riggs's "cowboys swooped down upon [the trainmaster] and rescued" the tent. But not before "a fusillade of shots, an iron tent stake in the hands of an irate engineer swung about with such vigor that one man was laid out with a blow

on the head and another on the arm, a yelling, howling mob in a running fight and final melee marked the leaving of the Parker amusement train from this city for Boone."⁵⁸

Riggs' Wild West then continued on its own, playing towns in Iowa and Arkansas. Riggs sent an update to the *Clipper* in November after dealing with some bad weather. He reported: "We played Corning, Ark., Nov. 13, which was as cold and nasty a day as usually comes to the lot of any show. The afternoon performance was given to well filled tents, and at night, though it rained and sleeted from half past six P.M. until two A.M. next day, the tent was more than half full. The two shows left a neat little balance on the day for the company." Riggs said he feared "nothing in the way of weather or competition after passing through the thirteenth of November at Corning."⁵⁹

Riggs closed his 1906 season of 30 weeks at McGehee, Arkansas, on November 28. He set up winter quarters on his plantation at Parkin, Cross County, Arkansas, and began to make plans for enlarging the show for the following year.⁶⁰



C.W. Riggs was included in Billboard's 1907 list of "Successful Circus Proprietors."

Circus World Museum

As I have not come across any route books of Riggs's, and there may never have been any issued, I have relied on a number of sources to reconstruct his route. His first month or two in operation, Riggs advertised in newspapers where he would be playing, but finding these can be a long process and often by chance. Even searching for the newspapers of small towns in Arkansas where I knew he played left me empty-handed, as many small papers are no longer completely extant. Beginning in July, he did send route information to the *Clipper* and *Billboard*, but published dates and places sometimes changed from issue to issue. An example being his route listing to Boone, Iowa, with the New Parker Amusement Company, which he probably did not follow after the break-up. Also he did not consistently send information to the route lists. Other towns show up as addresses in the *Clipper* and *Billboard* advertisements he placed, and other venues have been discovered from letters of reference kept in his scrapbook or newspaper articles found through Internet searches. If Riggs was doing well at a venue and did not need new acts, it seems he did not advertise nor keep his route list up to date.⁶¹

At the turn of the 20th century, the Wild West show was in its heyday, but also on the brink of decline, largely disappearing by World War I. Nonetheless, like Riggs' Wild West, there were many small companies competing with each other and with the big shows like Pawnee Bill's and Miller Brothers 101 Ranch and – the granddaddy of them all – Buffalo Bill's. Cody had started the Wild West show



and continued to dominate it, and the example he set created expectations among the public. Traditional features included trick riding and shooting and various attacks on stagecoaches or covered wagons. By 1900 circus elements also were incorporated into Wild West shows, all of which can be seen in the earlier description of Riggs' Wild West.⁶²

Season 1907. Riggs's first year on the road had been successful enough that he was looking forward to 1907 from his winter quarters in Parkin, Arkansas. He began to advertise in February, seeking a 12-piece band, more cowboys and general working men, as well as girls with red hair. The ads appeared regularly in February and March. Riggs was featured with a photograph among 68 "Successful Circus Proprietors" in *Billboard*'s two-page spread on March 16, which likely helped him attract the performers who appeared by name on a regular basis in the entertainment weeklies that year.⁶³

Harry Overton, who had 20 years' experience as an agent and manager, among other positions, signed on as superintendent in February. By April he was in Indian Territory rounding up Seminoles, Cherokees, and Creeks to work in the show. But the relationship did not last long, and the two must have had a falling out. In May Overton advertised that he was at liberty, seeking a new position, and noted that he had "just canceled an unprofitable, disagreeable job."⁶⁴

In the meantime, Riggs opened his season in late April at White City Park in Louisville, Kentucky, for a two-and-



The Irwin Bros. operated a Wild West, seen here in 1914, around the same time as the Riggs show.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

a-half-week engagement. His roster appeared in both the *Clipper* and *Billboard*. Included were the 10-piece Feagans Family Band, barrel-jumper Glenn T. Riggs (no relation), lariat-twirler J. F. Brackenridge, and rifle-shooter Kit Carson, Jr. In addition, there was Old Chief Black Cloud and his band of Navajo warriors, Frog Foot the medicine man, Prairie Rose, Wild Lillie, Navajo Bonita, Mexican bucking-horse rider Chiquita Belle, Cliff Dweller Annie, and Hippodrome Jimmie, who was to provide fun for the children and was likely a clown. There were also unnamed stock cowboys and cowgirls.⁶⁵

The lack of last names for many of the performers may have permitted the parts to be played by different people, but the use of stage names was also common. Prairie Rose, for example, could have been a generic name, but there was a cowgirl known as Prairie Rose Henderson, originally Ann Robbins, who performed at rodeos and with the Irwin Brothers Wild West show some years later. Kit Carson, Jr., who was *not* a son of the famous frontiersman, worked for Cody in 1874 and then started his own show. A photograph identifies him as Jim Spleen, but if this was the same person, he would have been rather long in the tooth by the time he was working for Riggs.⁶⁶

Wild Lillie, however, can be identified as Lillian Massey, Riggs's fifth and last wife. Riggs and his third wife, Althea, who was with him during the years of the department store shows, divorced about 1900. Althea moved back to Chicago, taking their son and daughter with her, and remarried

several years later. About 1903, Riggs was involved with a woman named Grant and fathered a daughter by her. Not much is known about her, but she was probably Grant Kerr of New York City. She was likely just a teenager when they met and may well have been one of Riggs's red-haired stenographers or clerks. They were not together long and may not have married. She moved out west and married some years later.

Riggs married Lillie Massey twice. First in a common-law arrangement by written contract in Augusta, Georgia, in January 1906, and legally in Corsicana, Texas, in May 1913. As Riggs chose new wives, their ages tended to remain about the same, from the late teens to early twenties. This meant, as time progressed, that there was an ever-widening disparity in ages between Riggs and his wives. A number of the young women also came from less-stable families, where parents had already died or grandparents had taken over guardianship. It is difficult to determine Lillie's exact age, as her birth years vary from 1889-1894 in the censuses and other legal documents. It is likely, however, that Riggs chose common-law marriage because Lillie was underage for a legal marriage. Riggs would have been 48 at the time he and Lillie married, and she might have been only 15 or 16. Six weeks before Riggs' Wild West opened their 1907 season in Louisville, Lillie gave Riggs the first of four daughters.⁶⁷ This apparently did not keep her from performing in the show; a granddaughter remembers Lillie telling her she performed as a trick shot.

Riggs continued to advertise and add new personnel as the season progressed. As reported in the May 25 *Clipper*, Paul C. Blum, formerly with Cody's show, signed on as general agent. C. C. "Blackjack" Lee, a cowboy and fancy rider, joined the show in late May, while W. F. Spencer was gathering more Indians out West. He met the show at Xenia, Ohio, with a band of Sioux. Robert Welden, who may have used the stage name "Buckskin Pete," was also with the show, as was William "Boney" Merrill. J. S. Potts, who had served as general agent of Vogel's Minstrels, was announced as press agent for Riggs in July.⁶⁸

A brief under "Circus Gossip" in the July 13 *Billboard* reported that Riggs' Wild West was playing at Cedar Point amusement park in Sandusky, Ohio. Several of the company and their specialties were noted:

The Crawford Brothers, broncho busters, of Medora, N. D., joined the show at Cedar Point and are making good. Charles Taylor, chief of the cook house force, is dishing up the stuff that the people like and they are well and happy. Kit Carson, Jr., is creating a sensation with his sharp shooting. Prairie Rose, the champion girl roper, is doing some very catchy stunts with the lasso. She is ably assisted by Capt. Breckenridge [sic] and T. Riggs, two other experts. Capt. Riggs is proud of his fine lot of horses and they attract much favorable comment. The show is booked for some of the biggest of the fall fairs.⁶⁹

Stunt-roper T. Riggs was none other than Riggs's son, Timberline, who would turn 17 years old in August. A daughter remembered his rope tricks and noted that he also did trick riding. Another person who traveled with Riggs's show was Leeburn Newton, who as a young man had been in show business for 10 years. He played the trombone and also performed as a character actor. Interviewed at age 88, Newton remembered, "I tried circus life with the Riggs Wild West Show for six weeks. Too much playing and no sleeping. I left it as soon as I could."⁷⁰

By early August, a story on Olentangy Park in Columbus, Ohio, where Riggs' Wild West was playing, described his outfit as consisting of "75 Indians, cowboys and ranch girls," and over 50 horses.⁷¹ Did Riggs have that many people? The 25 or so noted above would not have taken account of all the support crew and extras needed to put on a show, and many of those people likely did double duty. So it is possible that, at its peak, Riggs' Wild West did support that many. The stars of the show whose names were promoted,

however, were a much smaller group, and they were different from those of the year before, raising doubts as to the size of Riggs' show. Based on advertisements, Riggs never seemed to have more than a two-car show, however, so it raises questions how he could have transported that many people, animals, and equipment in just two cars. Perhaps, for longer engagements, he relied on hiring local extras.

In late September, Riggs ran another ad for personnel, probably hoping to get a jump on attracting good people for the following season. Giving his winter quarters address in Parkin, Arkansas, Riggs advertised for "Riders, Boss Canvas Man, Professional people ALL branches. C. W. Riggs' Enterprises furnish employment for 300 people the year round."⁷² But did they, or was this again hopeful promotion? Or did "Riggs' Enterprises" include workers on his plantations?

An article Riggs wrote for *The Billboard* a few years later about an efficiently run small show offers insight to his own operation. In 1913, after Riggs had retired to northwest Arkansas, he took his family to see "Honest Bill's show," which set up in a nearby town. The outfit consisted of 20 draft animals and 32 ponies, plus one elephant, two lions, a camel, and a small assortment of other animals. There was one large tent and one smaller one, and the lot traveled on nine wagons. Riggs commented to his wife, "This is the little trick I had in mind, a number of years ago, when the fire came and destroyed our entire outfit, horses included, at Augusta, Ga." When Riggs inquired of Honest Bill how many he had to run the show, Bill replied, "I never make my show out any larger than what it actually is." His crew consisted of just 13 people. Riggs was impressed that Honest Bill could put on such a good show with such a lean crew, bemoaning his own costs in having had his show transported by the railroads.⁷³ When it came to his own show, however, it seems that Riggs's homey ideals may have been at odds with his ambition.

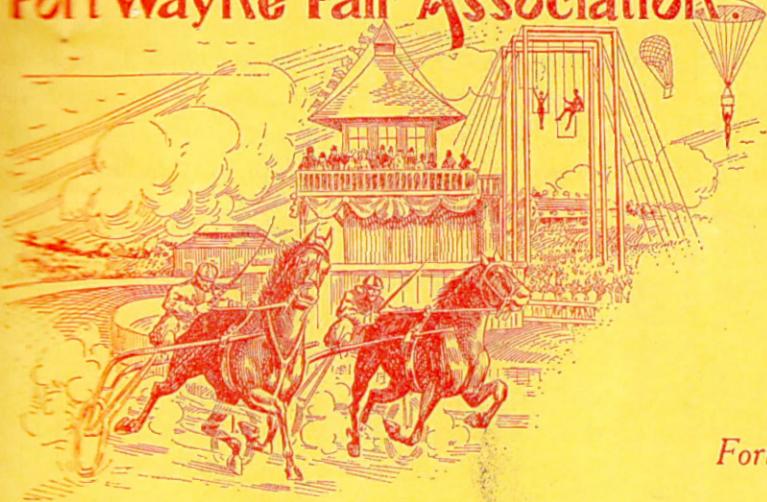
As in the previous year, Riggs's 1907 route listings are again intermittent and unclear, with likely omissions. His routes sometimes appeared in the route lists in the *Billboard* and *Clipper*, as well as in the advertisements he placed in those periodicals. Other locations were derived from letters of reference in the Riggs Scrapbook or newspaper articles.

Riggs opened his season in late April in Louisville, Kentucky, went on to Lexington, and then spent most of the remainder of the season in Ohio. He seems to have had long-term engagements at both Olentangy Park in Columbus and Cedar Point in Sandusky. After a June engagement

THE GREAT FORT WAYNE FAIR

DATES—SEPTEMBER 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 1907

Fort Wayne Fair Association.



JOHN C. PETERS, PRESIDENT

FRED J. HAYDEN, VICE PRESIDENT

E. H. McDONALD, TREASURER

DR. WM. F. MEYERS, SECRETARY

Fort Wayne, Ind., 11-27-07.

C W Riggs.

Riggs Amusement Co.

Memphis Tenn.

Dear Sirs:-

Your letter received and in reply will say, that I can heartly recomend Col. Riggs show to anybody that wants a clean Wild West exhibition for a Fair or any other event of amusement to entertain the publick, for they surely do it right and people go back to see it the second time, besides the show he is surounded by all good people that are Ladies and Gentlemen all the time and are less trouble than any other privilege man I ever had busines with. Wishing you every succes I beg to remain,

Yours truly,

Wm. Myers. Sec'y.

A letter from the Fort Wayne Fair Association endorsing Riggs and praising his Wild West.

Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minnesota

at Olentangy, the park president ensured him that “any time you are in this city, or in the neighborhood[,] run over and stay a week with us whether you have a contract or not.” Cedar Point was also pleased with his performance, and after a two-week engagement there in June, the *Clipper* reported that Riggs had been re-engaged for the rest of the season.⁷⁴ When not at the two amusement parks, Riggs was playing various county fairs throughout Ohio, as well as a few in Missouri and Indiana, including the Fort Wayne Fair in the third week of September. “Boney” Merrill said that the show had also played in Illinois and West Virginia, probably late August to early September, but nothing else has been found to verify those locations.⁷⁵ The Fort Wayne Fair is the last dated engagement I have found for the year. Riggs then returned to winter quarters on his plantation at Parkin, Arkansas.

Based on the six letters of recommendation for 1907 performances found in the Riggs Scrapbook, Riggs’ Wild West delivered as promised, and both contractors and audience were well pleased. A common theme was how the members were “ladies and gentlemen.” Considering that traveling performers often had reputations as people of poor moral character and illegal activities, this was high praise indeed.⁷⁶

As Riggs wrapped up the 1907 season and headed for a rest in winter quarters in Arkansas, he likely felt good about the prospects for Riggs’ Wild West. The year was a success and he no doubt expected to do as well, if not better, the following year. What he could not anticipate, however, was a national crisis, the financial Panic of 1907, which came to a head in October and led to bankruptcies of banks and businesses and a stock market crash. The after-effects into 1908 meant that potential audiences had less money to spend, or were less willing to spend it, on such frivolities as a Wild West show.

Season 1908. The financial conditions at the beginning of 1908 presented the tent show proprietors with uncertain prospects. It cost money to put a show on the road, and trying to gauge the right moment to open their seasons required a crystal ball. An article in *Billboard* late in the year, which summed up the 1908 season, while generally upbeat, acknowledged the spring difficulties:

The panic was working its cancerous way in business conditions at the period when the circus proprietors should have begun to make preparations for the season. A number of them were con-

fronted with a thick haze, which obscured their business vision. The gambler would say they were afflicted with ‘cold feet,’ and, at any rate, they decided that conditions were so doubtful that the wise thing to do was not to go out in the spring.⁷⁷

In February, a paragraph on Riggs’ Wild West at winter quarters appeared under “Circus Gossip” in *Billboard*. While the piece played off the tone of the depressed state of affairs, the overall report was cheery and full of promise. It also provides us with a glimpse of what the show looked like:

Things around Riggs’ Wild West winter quarters are looking decidedly “blue.” Seats, jacks, stringers and poles for the big arena all have the regulation coat. Next the bright red is in order, and when the green appears in the spring and the red birds begin to sing, all will be in readiness for business. The canvas is new from end to end, the cars have all been repainted and the show is now ready to take the road on two weeks’ notice. Most of the old people of last season have been retained, the show has been considerably enlarged and some strong features have been added.⁷⁸

Nonetheless, Riggs undoubtedly was eyeing the season ahead with some concern. He apparently had contacted Col. M. H. Welsh, who operated the Great American One Ring Circus, at his winter quarters in Atlanta, Georgia, proposing a joint venture. Welsh replied to Riggs on March 22: “I think if you take trip over to Atlanta, we can do business together. If you can arrange to come, telegraph me. I meet you. Let me hear from you” [spelling and punctuation corrected].⁷⁹ Nothing more is found regarding this proposal.

In late March Riggs began running ads for personnel in the *Billboard* and *Clipper*, giving as his address 435 Ross Avenue, in Memphis, Tennessee. Riggs planned to open his season on May 9 in Memphis, whether at an amusement park or on a leased lot is not known. His March ad was headlined “Wanted for Two Car Show,” and he sought singers and dancers, as well as a cook and boss canvasman. In April Riggs added the need for an agent and a promoter, and was insistent that he would check references. In May he continued to advertise for a strong feature act, sister team or trio, dancers and singers, and even “amateurs willing to learn to ride in parade.”⁸⁰

THE WORLD'S GREATEST



WAGON SHOW

WINTER QUARTERS: ATLANTA, GEORGIA

March 22 1908

My Dear Riggs
I think if you take trip
over to Atlanta - We can
Do Business together if
you can Range to come
telegraph me i Meant you
let me have from you
Yours truly
M H Welsh

In 1908 M. H. Welsh responded to Riggs's request to consider a business partnership.

Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minnesota

In early May Riggs sent two notices to the *Clipper*, the first of which offered free winter quarters to other tent shows:

Wales Riggs' Plantations offer to the tent show world absolutely free space for Winter quarters for ten years, lumber to make desired buildings, and, in fact, a home for all that care to come, right on the railroad or river, free stock range, where stock will keep in good order all winter without being fed, fine hunting for the boys when not busy in Winter quarters, firewood free, no water or other tax. The Riggs Co. state that they will forfeit \$100 to this paper, also \$100 to any deserving charity that this paper may designate if the above offer is not bona fide and true in every detail.⁸¹

It is intriguing to wonder what motivated Riggs to make the offer. Perhaps by May the outlook for the season was so depressed that some tent shows would not be able to make a profit and might not be able to pay or have access to extended winter quarters. Riggs's generosity may also have had an ulterior motive in that any tent shows who took him up on the offer would provide added hands to assist with the work on the plantations and kindly disposed crews who might be willing to join with Riggs in the future. His second notice, appearing in the same column, clearly acknowledged the season's difficulties:

We have set our opening date for May 9, owing to the panicky outlook for the season. We have strengthened our programme to about double that of former years, the management giving as reason the belief that the public will respond no matter what the times, if they know they are getting big returns for their money. A cowboy quartette, a cowgirl quartette, and two sister teams have been added, making of the show a Wild West musical novelty, instead of purely Wild West, as in former seasons. All the people engaged are anxiously looking "to see the wheels go 'round."⁸²

As if the rocky financial climate was not bad enough, the 1908 spring season was also plagued by extremely bad weather. Beginning on April 23 and officially lasting for 3 days, the 1908 Dixie Tornado Outbreak in the Great Plains and Southeast is considered the fourth deadliest continuous outbreak, now tied with the more recent April 2011 Su-



BUFFALO BILL

*James F. D. Farley
Buffalo Bill*

Buffalo Bill, seen here in a poster printed by A. Gast & Co. of St. Louis, circa 1887, was admired by Riggs and many other contemporaries.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

per Outbreak. The 1908 weather event produced at least 29 tornadoes in 13 states, and caused over 300 deaths and over a thousand injuries. It produced devastating tornadoes of F2 and above, including five F4s and one F5.⁸³

One of those F4s struck, on April 24, the town of Amite, Louisiana, where the Alabama Carnival Company was playing. The tornado cut a two-mile-wide swath through town, killing 29 people and leveling many structures before it moved into Mississippi and destroyed the town of Purvis, killing an additional 55 and leaving only seven out of 150 buildings standing. The Carnival Company escaped injury, but its equipment was destroyed, and they were without shelter, food and resources. As soon as the news reached the *Billboard*, a relief fund was organized, and the Illinois Central Railroad gathered the company and took them to Memphis.⁸⁴

Two days later, on April 26, another tornado hit a second traveling company. It is not known why this date is not included as part of the three-day Dixie Outbreak, since it



C. W. Riggs was featured in the October 4, 1891 Illustrated Buffalo Express.

undoubtedly must have been part of the same severe storm system, but may have been overlooked by analysts as an outlier. Nonetheless, its effects were devastating to the Wright Carnival Company, which was onboard a steamboat that had shortly before left Helena, Arkansas, for Caruthersville, Missouri, when the tornado struck. The boat was lifted out of the water and flung back into the river, where survivors clung to wreckage for several hours until help arrived. Eleven people were killed; survivors again were taken to Memphis. The tornado outbreak, while the worst, was not the only bad weather experienced by the traveling shows.

At about the same date, the John Robinson Ten Big Shows opened in Cincinnati, Ohio, to freezing temperatures, cold rain, and three inches of snow.⁸⁵

During the bad weather Riggs would have been in Memphis, while his company was likely still in Parkin, Arkansas, both only about 50 miles, as the crow flies, from Helena. Although there are no reports that Riggs' Wild West suffered any harm, they were clearly in the bull's-eye of the storm front. His next missive to the *Clipper* reported that "Owing to the cold and rainy weather the date of opening has been postponed from May 9 to 16." He also reported that the Jefferson Quartette, of Jefferson, Missouri, had signed with the show, and that the show would play a week in Memphis before heading out for one-night stands. Probably the same week that Riggs was playing in Memphis, Fairyland Park, one of Memphis's amusement parks, was destroyed by fire. Although Riggs' Wild West probably was not playing at Fairyland, the loss of the park, on top of the financial panic and the tornado outbreak, could only have further dampened the company's spirits.⁸⁶

Even with delaying the start of their season and a week in Memphis, the prospects for Riggs' Wild West did not look good. They played one-night stands at the end of May in Arkansas and Missouri, then there was a break until mid-June, when one-night stands resumed in Missouri and Kansas. Riggs continued to advertise for performers and crew members, seeking a side show manager, bill posters, bucking riders, and musicians. He rarely submitted his routes to the route list, however, instead including them at the bottom of his ads. When the *Clipper* ran their Directory of Tent Show People in July, the Jefferson Quartette was the only listing for Riggs' Wild West.⁸⁷

At the end of June, Riggs got a several-week engagement at Forest Park in Kansas City, Missouri. While he received brief mentions in the periodicals, he was not getting the press coverage he had the year before.⁸⁸ And bad luck continued to follow him. One of his bronco-busters, 26-year-old Oran A. Russell, was thrown from a horse during the show and landed on a tent stake. The newspaper reported he was near death.⁸⁹

From late July through August, Riggs' Wild West played stands of about four nights each throughout Missouri, likely representing county fairs or carnivals. His advertisements, with his routes at the bottom, again appeared in the *Billboard* and *Clipper*. He was seeking women singers and riders, girls to ride in the parade, and musical acts. By September, as he moved into Illinois, his list of needed personnel expanded. He wanted band members, cowboys and

Indians, a girl nurse, a cook, a treasurer and ticket seller, an assistant general manager, and an agent with tent show experience. It appears that his employees were now abandoning what may have been perceived as a failing operation.⁹⁰

Again, it is difficult to know if the routes found in Riggs's ads were the only places he played that season, or if he just did not bother to regularly send his route lists to the periodicals. Nonetheless, 1908 showed a clear contrast in his public face from the two preceding years. Riggs' Wild West is absent in the route lists, absent in the directory, absent in "circus gossip" and other briefs. Even in his personal scrapbook, no glowing letters of reference are found; the only letter pertaining to the 1908 season being the one from Welsh's Great American One Ring Circus.

In mid-September an article appeared in an Illinois paper touting Riggs's show at the St. Clair County Fair. Riggs had offered free admission to women and children with red hair, a quirk that continued to gain him positive attention. The article also provided a description of the show:

Some of the scenes enacted are: The wagon train attacked by Indians and rescued by cowboys; the tenderfoot on the plains held up by cowboys and brought in, initiating him into the real roughness of cowboy life; hanging a horsethief; fancy roping and trick riding; fancy riding by Wounded Buffalo, a [Navajo] Indian; riding bucking horses by cowboys; a race by two cowgirls on two white Arabian ponies, and other similar acts and feats.⁹¹

It was standard fair for Wild West shows, but it was already too late for Riggs. His last ad seeking personnel was published in both the *Billboard* and *Clipper* on September 26.⁹² Two months later, at the end of November, also in both periodicals, his first ad offering to sell the show, appeared:

For Sale—Riggs Wild West Shows[.] Neatest and best two-car outfit on the road. Can prove it. Two cars 65 ft. each, horses, canvas, seats, guns, saddles, costumes, wagons, complete from end to end, ready to set up any day. Sell at a bargain; separate, or together. Send for list. All correspondence cheerfully answered.⁹³

Riggs gave his location as St. Louis, Missouri. In December the show was again listed in winter quarters in Parkin, Arkansas, but the *Billboard* reported that "Riggs is wintering in St. Louis, in his own cars, with no plans as yet

for next season."⁹⁴

Riggs's entertainment venture had come to an end. Despite the promising start he had made in the first two years, the problems of 1908 were too much to overcome. The bad spring weather and the depressed financial climate, both of which needed to be sunny and positive for a traveling tent show to have a chance, were too big an obstacle for Riggs's show in its first years. Added to that was the competition from other Wild West shows.

Researcher Don Russell has noted that the "first two decades of the twentieth century were the heyday of the Wild West show." Many small shows, like Riggs's, playing carnivals and county fairs with limited advertising, lasted for only a short period of time. They competed against the longer-running, large shows, such as those of Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and Miller Bros.'s 101 Ranch. Russell estimates the 1910 season to be the largest for operating Wild West shows during those decades, with 18 touring shows, at least eight of which consisted of 10 or more cars. The combined Two Bills Show of Buffalo Bill Cody and Pawnee Bill Lillie was the largest of them all, with some 59 cars. In a perusal of the *Billboard* for the years 1907-1909, two of the years when Riggs was active and the year following his close, I counted 26 Wild West shows. Several of those appear to be the same show under slightly different names, reducing the number to about 20, but lists compiled by Russell show others I did not find, which would increase that number. With only 46 states in the Union during those years, there essentially was about one traveling Wild West show for every two states, and undoubtedly more of them were concentrated in the more heavily populated areas. The competition for a small show would have been stiff indeed.⁹⁵

Season 1909. Riggs, living in St. Louis that winter, continued to run his sale advertisement in the *Billboard* at least once a month from January to April, while Riggs' Wild West was listed in winter quarters in Parkin, Arkansas.⁹⁶ The cars and equipment were likely with Riggs in St. Louis, while the livestock and perhaps some of the crew may have been sent to his plantation in Parkin. As the spring weather freshened, Riggs must have felt the old pull of the road, for in the April 17 *Billboard* he ran the old ad on page 18 and two pages later a more hopeful one:

For Sale—Wanted[.] Will sell, rent, combine or take partner who can handle the advance. Neatest little show on road. Three cars, 65 feet each. Outfit first-class from end to end. Ready for road now.

Wanted—Versatile and working people in all lines; ten piece Band. Privileges for sale. Sober, reliable people only.⁹⁷

Riggs gave as his St. Louis address the location of First and Cornelia streets. It is not known how a two-car show now became a three-car show, unless he simply had a third car available to rent in case someone took him up on the partnership. He continued to run this ad through April and May to the middle of June, when it again reverted to a two-car show, while still seeking a partner.⁹⁸ Versions of this ad ran into October. In December the outfit was again listed in winter quarters, this time in St. Louis. One more ad appeared, ever hopeful: "Will sell entire outfit or take partner and enlarge; or will combine with several experienced showmen and incorporate. We want good men, willing to work and build the show larger, and grow up with it." He now gave 26 N. Spring Avenue as his St. Louis address.⁹⁹

There is no evidence, however, that Riggs's more hopeful tone regarding the Wild West show led to another season of touring. No routes nor ads indicating performance venues were published, nor did Riggs appear in the circus roster or showman's directory of the *Billboard* that year.¹⁰⁰ Instead, he began to turn his focus toward his agricultural lands in Arkansas, and the two letters in his scrapbook for 1909 are references pertaining to his real estate dealings.

The Simple Life (1910-1917)

As 1910 dawned Riggs continued to advertise the sale of the Wild West show in the *Billboard*, with ads appearing from January to March. While the outfit still was listed in winter quarters in St. Louis, it was not listed in the circus roster or among Wild West shows that would tour that year.¹⁰¹

Instead, Riggs immersed himself in the real estate business. From the time he had begun making money from his Indian artifact dealing, Riggs invested profits into agricultural land in Arkansas. Now, with the Wild West show venture winding down, he focused on his land, buying additional property and promoting investment opportunities. He produced a 16-page circular, titled "Great Money Makers," outlining the investment potential in cotton, pecans and mules. In May he was appointed a vice-president-at-large of the Arkansas Land Congress, and the 1910 U. S. Census shows his occupation as a real estate agent.¹⁰²

Sometime in late spring or early summer, however, Riggs and his family, consisting of Lillie and their two little daughters, were caught up in a back-to-the-land movement,

often referred to as the "simple life," catalyzed by an article in the January 1910 *Saturday Evening Post* by William R. Lighton.¹⁰³ Lighton described his experiences of successfully running a family farm near Fayetteville, Arkansas, based on scientific practices as promoted by the University of Arkansas College of Agriculture. His idyllic description spurred an influx of settlers to the Fayetteville area, and Riggs was among them. Riggs purchased land in Washington County, just south of Fayetteville, in the community of Greenland. He named the place Maple Cliff Farm and began raising hogs.

His next ad in the *Billboard*, in January 1911, indicated that he had sent the cars and show property to Cincinnati, Ohio, but that offers should be addressed to him in Fayetteville. He assured interested parties that "Best offer takes it regardless of value." The ad continued to run regularly through the end of the year. Riggs' Wild West, now with a Fayetteville location, appeared in March in the *Billboard's* winter quarters listing, yet in the same issue Riggs did not appear in the Complete Circus Roster nor the Showman's Directory.¹⁰⁴

In mid-September Riggs sent a letter to the *Billboard* describing a performance of the Hagenbeck-Wallace Show after it played Fayetteville. He said he just wanted to "express the feelings of an old-timer, wandering for a single day among the white tops after a lengthy period of retirement to the 'simple life.'" He also mentioned that he had broken his leg back in February and had been "slow in recovering." About two weeks later, he was spotted among the visitors to the Two Bills Show in St. Louis and an article described him as "formerly of Riggs' Wild West, now retired, and enjoying the comforts of the 'simple life.'"¹⁰⁵

In 1912, Riggs's ads and listings in winter quarters from Fayetteville continued to appear in the *Billboard*. The ad changed in late April after he apparently sold one of the cars. The new ad stated: "For Sale—Fine Car, 64-ft; Horse Tent, 30x40; Ticket Boxes, 4,000 sheets paper, and quantity miscellaneous small stuff. Send for list. Riggs' Wild West Shows, Greenland, Ark." This ad appeared into May and then stopped. Riggs again mentioned his broken leg in a short announcement in the March 16, 1912, *Billboard* that stated: "Riggs' Wild West Show will not go out this season, owing to the fact that Capt. Riggs, manager, broke his leg some time ago, and has not recovered sufficiently to be on the road."¹⁰⁶

Riggs seems to be sending mixed signals. It is clearly stated by himself and others that he had retired and moved on to other things, yet a part of him obviously still wanted

to be in the game. Even his broken leg, while certainly possible, may have just been a face-saving excuse as to why he was not taking out the show. While the announcement hints at previous seasons, I have found no evidence that Riggs' Wild West performed after 1908. In 1912 Riggs was 55 years old and certainly old enough to retire from an arduous life on the road.

Riggs's last connection to the world of tent shows was the June 1913 letter to the *Billboard* I cited at the beginning of this article. As he said: "The simple life has its manifold allurements, after having been years in the game.... When I came out on the mountain-top to retire, I promised myself that I had left the old life behind....¹⁰⁷

Thus, Riggs and his family settled into life on the farm in Arkansas, with Riggs occasionally submitting letters on agricultural topics to periodicals. Two more daughters were born to the couple, one in 1912 and one in 1914. Between the two births, Riggs and Lillie legalized their common-law marriage in May 1913 at Corsicana, Texas. The rosy glow of the "simple life" in the Ozarks, however, was soon to tarnish.

By late 1915 Riggs's health had begun to fail. Then, on June 5 of the following year, one of the region's perennial severe storms cut a path of destruction through the state, killing 79 people and injuring 400 in towns from one side of Arkansas to the other. The first tornado touched down in Greenland on the Riggs farm. Three houses and a barn were destroyed, and several employees living on the farm were injured.¹⁰⁸ Probably around the same time, Riggs discovered that Lillie had taken a lover. He filed for divorce, and the decree was granted in October 1916. Riggs gained sole custody of the four little girls, ranging in age from 9 to 2 years. About six weeks later, he took the girls to Tampa, Florida.

Why Riggs chose Florida is not known, as it was not a state that figured in his past, although he certainly could have had contacts there. He probably hoped that the warmer climate would improve his health and perhaps he saw real estate opportunities. Riggs did, however, want to remove the girls from any contact with their mother. He took them to Florida, had them baptized in the Catholic faith, and left them under the care of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary. He had less than a year to get his affairs in order. On November 19, 1917, C. W. Riggs passed away.

Shortly after, the *Billboard* ran an obituary. It read, in part:

Captain C. W. Riggs, retired showman, died at his home, Tampa, Fla., November 19, following a long illness. Captain Riggs was a well-known circus man



Great Money Makers

Cotton
Pecan Orchards
Young Mules

How the
Horse and Cattle
Kings and Queens
are made

in years gone by, and up until four or five years ago had managed his own shows, with headquarters in New York City. Retiring from the show business he became a large holder of [Ar]Kansas farm property. In October he returned to Tampa in the last stages of Bright's disease, and from then on his death was daily expected.¹⁰⁹

In his will, Riggs indicated that his body should be returned to Washtenaw County, Michigan, and buried in the cemetery at Sylvan near his father. C. W. Riggs rests, however, in Woodlawn Cemetery in Tampa, Florida.

Riggs had spent the last part of his life in show business and had made a name for himself among the Wild West show circuit. He was well-known enough to be colleagues with such luminaries as William F. Cody and Gordon W. Lillie. Yet Riggs never rose to the prominence of a large or long-lived show that would ensure his name among the greats of the business. In fact, Riggs has largely been forgotten today.

Riggs's story, however, illuminates the world of the small tent-show operator. Those numerous but ephemeral Wild West shows, whose names alone may be all that are left to us, played the carnivals and county fairs in small towns throughout America at the turn of the 20th century. They may not have had the glitz and glamour of the big shows, but for a little time, their magic lit the dreams of many small-town girls and boys. **BW**

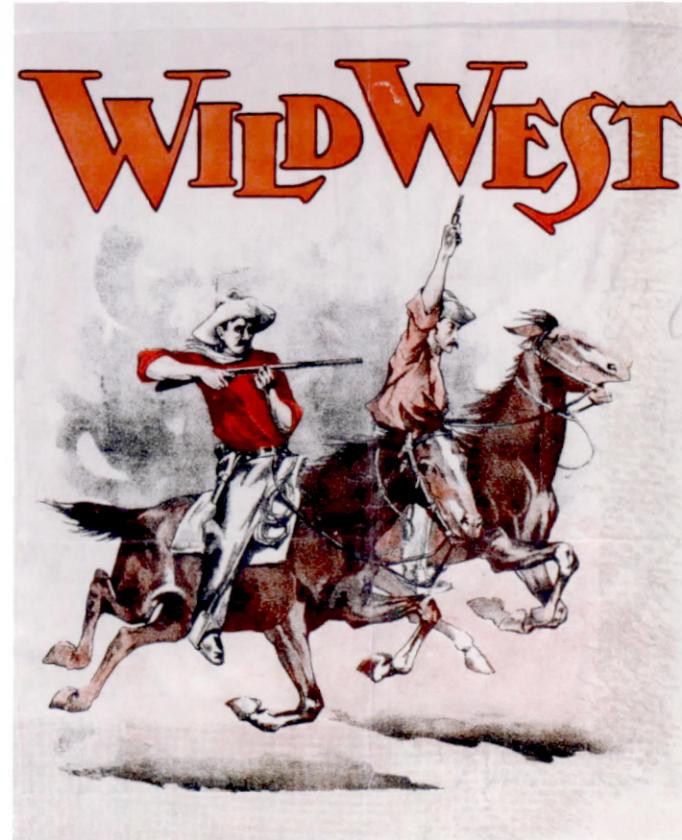
Mary L. Kwas recently retired from the Arkansas Archeological Survey, a unit of the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, where she worked as a research associate. She was researching Riggs's activities excavating Arkansas Indian mounds in the late 1880s and exhibiting the artifacts at expositions in the Midwest when she stumbled on his subsequent career as the operator of a Wild West show. Kwas holds a Master's degree in Anthropology from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She is the author of a book on the history of Arkansas's Old State House and another on the historical archaeology of the town of Washington, Arkansas. Kwas and her husband currently reside near Lansing, Michigan. She would like to thank all the Riggs descendants and others who graciously shared information and photographs. If any readers have additional Riggs materials, she would be pleased to hear from them.

Riggs, ca. 1910, from the cover of a promotional brochure for his agricultural ventures.

Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minnesota

Endnotes

1. *The Billboard*, June 28, 1913:25.
2. *Illustrated Buffalo Express* (NY), October 4, 1891:5; *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette* (OH), October 22, 1887:3.
3. Robert C. Mainfort, Jr., Sam Dellinger: *Raiders of the Lost Arkansas* (University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 2008).
4. Letter, W. F. Cody to C. W. Riggs, August 26, 1910 (Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minn.); L. G. Moses, *Wild West Shows and the Images of American Indians, 1883-1933* (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1996), 30; J. W. Weeks & Co.'s *Detroit City Directory* for 1885 (R. L. Polk & Co., publisher, Detroit, Mich., 1885), 960.
5. C. W. Riggs, *How We Find Relics* (W. B. Conkey Co., Printers, 1893), 65-67.
6. *Cincinnati Commercial Gazette*, June 19, 1887:4.
7. Letter, C. W. Riggs to F. W. Hooper, February 9, 1900 (Brooklyn Museum Archives, Culin Archival Collection, Objects [4.2.001]. Southwest 1897-1905); Inflation calculator, www.davemanuel.com.
8. *Buffalo Express* (New York), September 26, 1891:5.
9. Don Russell, *The Wild West or, A History of the Wild West Shows...* (Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas, 1970), 43-44; Nellie Snyder Yost, *Buffalo Bill: His Family, Friends, Fame, Failures, and Fortunes* (Swallow Press, Inc., Chicago, 1979), 236.
10. George Deslions, W. C. Perry, Administrator of Kate M. Perry, et al., Petitioners, vs. La Compagnie Generale Transatlantique, Owner of the Steamship "La Borgogne." Transcript of Record, Vol. II, Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1907, No. 33, On writ of Certiorari to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit. (20,253), p. 1874. Riggs served as what we would call an "expert witness" on this lawsuit involving the loss at sea of a large collection of Native American artifacts. His testimony, given in 1902 and 1903, provides an interesting historical perspective on the business of Indian curio dealers.
11. Deslions vs. La Compagnie, p. 1924; Timberline Riggs, World War I Draft Registration Card, 1917-1918, Clark County, Nevada (Ancestry.com).
12. Deslions vs. La Compagnie, p. 1871-2; Robert C. Mainfort, Jr., Sam Dellinger: *Raiders of the Lost*



Stock paper for an early 20th century Wild West show.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

- Arkansas (University of Arkansas Press, Fayetteville, 2008), 21.
13. Letter, G. W. Lillie to C. W. Riggs, August 26, 1910 (Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minn.).
14. *Kansas City Daily Journal* (Missouri), December 6, 1896:9, December 16, 1896:10, December 19, 1896:10.
15. Elizabeth Hutchinson, *The Indian Craze: Primitivism, Modernism, and Transculturation in American Art, 1890-1915* (Duke University Press, Durham, N.C., 2009), 18-20.
16. *Evening Star*, (Washington, D. C.) December 18, 1897:8.
17. C. W. Riggs, *Camp Life in the Wilderness* (self-published, c. 1897); Althea May Riggs, *Among the Indians* (Ketterlinus Litho. Mfg. Co., Philadelphia, c. 1897).
18. *Boston Evening Transcript* (MA), November 12, 1897:10.
19. Letter, Father O'Reilly to C. W. Riggs, October 23, 1901 (Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minn.).



The Kemp Sisters show, seen here in 1896, was among the early Wild West shows traveling by rail.

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20. Letters, C. W. Riggs to Franklin W. Hooper, December 28, 1898, February 23, 1899, (Brooklyn Museum Archives, Culin Archival Collection, Objects [4.2.001]. Southwest. 1897-1905).
21. *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), April 23, 1899:9.
22. Letter, C. W. Riggs to J. H. Gest, October 20, 1899 (Riggs Files, Cincinnati Art Museum and Cincinnati Museum Center, Ohio); Deslions vs. La Compagnie, pp. 1885-6; Secretary of State, Corporations of New Jersey, List of Certificates, Filed in the Department of State From 1895-1899, Inclusive (John L. Murphy Pub. Co., Printers, Trenton, N. J., 1900), 448, 543.
23. Deslions vs. La Compagnie, p. 1874-5.
24. *New York Clipper*, March 3, 1900:24; letterhead, March 7, 1900 (Scrapbook, Tibbals collection, John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art).
25. *New York Clipper*, September 15, 1900:648, October 13, 1900:723; *The Billboard*, November 3, 1900:5.
26. *New York Clipper*, March 9, 1901:36, November 25, 1905:1034.
27. Secretary of State, Corporations of New Jersey, List of Certificates, Filed in the Department of State During the Year 1900 (MacCrellish & Quigley, Book and Job Printers, Trenton, N. J., 1901), 190; Secretary of State, Corporations of New Jersey, List of Certificates, Filed in the Department of State During the Year 1901 (John L. Murphy Pub. Co., Printers, Trenton, N. J., 1902), 202.
28. *New-York Daily Tribune*, December 14, 1900:12; *New York Times*, December 15, 1900:9, December 16, 1900:13.
29. *New York Clipper*, September 7, 1901:608; St. Paul Globe, February 13, 1903:7.
30. Deslions vs. La Compagnie, p. 1885-6.
31. *New York Clipper*, September 7, 1901:608.
32. *New York Clipper*, September 7, 1901:604, September 14, 1901:624.
33. Corporations of New Jersey, List of Certificates, Filed in the Department of State During the Year 1901 (John L. Murphy Pub. Co., Printers, Trenton, N. J., 1902), 202.
34. *New-York Tribune*, October 1, 1901:4; Inflation calculator, www.davemanuel.com.
35. Letter, C. W. Riggs to Franklin W. Hooper, April 16, 1902, (Brooklyn Museum Archives, Culin Archival Collection, Objects [4.2.001]. Southwest. 1897-1905).
36. Letter, C. W. Riggs to Franklin W. Hooper, May 10, 1902, (Brooklyn Museum Archives, Culin Archival Collection, Objects [4.2.001]. Southwest. 1897-1905).
37. *New York Clipper*, May 10, 1902:253.
38. Corporations of New Jersey, List of Certificates, Filed in the Department of State During the Year 1903 (MacCrellish & Quigley, Book and Job Printers, Trenton, N. J., 1904), 247; Corporations of New Jersey, List of Certificates, Filed in the Department of State During the Year 1907 (MacCrellish & Quigley, State Printers Trenton, N. J., 1908), 232; Fibre and Fabric, Vol. 36, No. 934, January 24, 1903:281.
39. *New York Clipper*, March 28, 1903:122, June 20, 1903:408, August 8, 1903:565, October 24, 1903:844; *Evening World* (New York, N.Y.), February 3, 1903:3, evening edition.



A 1908 view of the Tiger Bill's Wild West lot.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

40. *New York Clipper*, February 6, 1904:1201, March 5 1904:44, April 2 1904:157.
41. *New York Clipper*, August 22, 1903:612, September 19, 1903:713.
42. *New York Clipper*, May 28, 1904:320.
43. *New York Clipper*, August 6, 1904:543.
44. *New York Clipper*, August 13, 1904:568, August 20, 1904:591, August 27, 1904:619.
45. *New York Clipper*, December 3, 1904:971.
46. *Augusta Chronicle* (GA), November 14, 1905:5; the Buffalo Bill Historical Center in Cody, WY, did not find Riggs's name among those with a documented connection to Cody (personal com. from Mary Robinson, McCracken Research Library, August 20, 2012).
47. *Augusta Chronicle* (GA), November 15, 1905:7; Inflation calculator, www.davemanuel.com.
48. *The Billboard*, March 14, 1906:38; *New York Clipper*, March 31, 1906:174.
49. *New York Clipper*, April 7, 1906:186.
50. *New York Clipper*, April 7, 1906:203; *Augusta Chronicle* (GA), April 17, 1906:6, April 19, 1906:7; *The Billboard*, April 14, 1906:33, April 21, 1906:24.
51. *Augusta Chronicle* (GA), April 27, 1906:8.
52. *Augusta Chronicle* (GA), April 27, 1906:10; *Greensboro Herald-Journal* (GA), April 27, 1906:2; *Marietta Journal* (GA), May 3, 1906:7.
53. *New York Clipper* April 28, 1906:278; May 19, 1906:370, October 13, 1906:911; *The Billboard* June 16, 1906:13, September 29, 1906:39.
54. *The Billboard*, April 4, 1906:33, November 24, 1906:32; *New York Clipper*, July 7, 1906:530-532, November 24, 1906:1063; *Cleveland Leader* (OH), June 10, 1906, Part 3:2; *Chillicothe Constitution* (MO), July 17, 1906, July 18, 1906.
55. Joel H. Bernstein, *Wild Ride: The History and Lore of Rodeo* (2007, Gibbs Smith, Pub., Layton, Utah), 61; University of Oregon Photograph Collection (boundless.uoregon.edu), accessed May 11, 2015.
56. *Cleveland Leader* (OH), June 10, 1906, Part 3:2.
57. *Chillicothe Morning Constitution* (MO), July 17, 1906; *Chillicothe Constitution* (MO), July 18, 1906; *Des Moines Daily News* (IA), August 7, 1906:6; *The Billboard*, August 18, 1906:34.
58. *Evening News* (Grand Forks, ND), September 7, 1906:6.
59. *New York Clipper*, November 24, 1906:1063.
60. *The Billboard*, December 15, 1906:54; *New York Clipper*, December 15, 1906:1139.
61. Among the Robert Harold Brisendine Papers, 1814-2002 (Collection 947, Subseries 1.2, Box 17, Folder 18), Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, there is a partially reconstructed route list for Riggs' Wild West that includes a number of Georgia towns probably found by advertisements in local papers.



Tiger Bill's Wild West, seen here in 1909, was a contemporary of Riggs' show.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

Unfortunately, sources are not provided.

62. Russell, *The Wild West*, 54, 85, 105, 114.
63. *New York Clipper*, February 9, 1907:1356; *The Billboard*, March 16, 1907:9.
64. *The Billboard*, February 16, 1907:27, April 27, 1907:23; *New York Clipper*, May 18, 1907:370.
65. *New York Clipper*, May 11, 1907:324; *The Billboard*, May 11, 1907:23.
66. On-line (<http://naglewarrenmansion.wordpress.com/2011/03/15/prairie-rose-henderson-early-cowgirl/>), accessed May 29, 2102; (<http://john-adcock.blogspot.com/2012/02/kit-carson-jr-matinee-idol-and-cover.html>), accessed May 29, 2012.
67. Divorce of C. W. and Lillie Riggs, Chancery Court Record M-467, Washington County, Arkansas, October 21, 1916.
68. *New York Clipper*, May 25, 1907:378, June 1, 1907:408, July 6, 1907:530-533, July 27, 1907:619; *The Billboard*, June 1, 1907:29, June 6, 1907:24; *Shelby Republican* (Indiana), September 13, 1907:4.
69. *The Billboard*, July 13, 1907:23.
70. *Southern Illinoisan* (Carbondale, Ill.), July 4, 1909:8.
71. *Democrat-Sentinel* (Logan, Ohio), August 1, 1907.
72. *New York Clipper*, September 21, 1907:843.
73. *The Billboard*, June 28, 1913:25.
74. Letter, Olentangy Park Company to C. W. Riggs, June 11, 1907 (Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minn.); *New York Clipper*, July 27 1907:619.

75. *Shelby Republican* (Indiana), September 13, 1907:4.
76. Letters to C. W. Riggs from Olentangy Park Company, June 11, 1907; Mayor's Office, Cardington, Ohio, June 19, 1907; Champaign County Fair, Ohio, August 16, 1907; Logan County Fair, Ohio, November 22, 1907; Fort Wayne Fair Association, Indiana, November 27, 1907; and Dekalb County Fair Association, Missouri, February 19, 1908 (Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minn.).
77. "The Past Circus Season," by Thomas Namack, *The Billboard*, December 5, 1908:19, 82.
78. *The Billboard*, February 29, 1908:18.
79. Letter, M. H. Welsh to C. W. Riggs, March 22, 1908 (Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minn.)
80. *The Billboard*, March 28, 1908:63, April 11, 1908:40, May 2, 1908:47; *New York Clipper*, May 2, 1908:290.
81. *New York Clipper*, May 2, 1908:295.
82. *New York Clipper*, May 2, 1908:295.
83. "1908 Dixie Tornado Outbreak," https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1908_Dixie_tornado_outbreak (accessed October 24, 2015).
84. *The Billboard*, May 2, 1908:17, May 9, 1908:17, May 16, 1908:24-25; Wikipedia, *ibid*.
85. *The Billboard*, May 9, 1908: 17, May 16, 1908:24-35, May 30, 1908:17.
86. *New York Clipper*, May 16, 1908:348, May 23, 1908:378.

87. *The Billboard*, May 23, 1908:20, May 30, 1908:29, June 13, 1908:25, June 20, 1908:19; *New York Clipper*, July 4, 1908:511.

88. *Kansas City Star* (Mo.), June 25, 1908:4; *New York Clipper*, July 18, 1908:560; *The Billboard*, July 18, 1908:5.

89. *Kansas City Journal* (Mo.), July 8, 1908.

90. *The Billboard*, August 1, 1908:13, August 15, 1908:42, August 22, 1908:47, September 5, 1908:80, September 26, 1908:15.

91. *Belleville News Democrat* (Ill.), September 16, 1908:1.

92. *New York Clipper*, September 26, 1908:817, November 28, 1908:1043; *The Billboard*, September 26, 1908:15.

93. *The Billboard*, November 28, 1908:33.

94. *The Billboard*, December 5, 1908:40, December 26, 1908:14.

95. "The Golden Age of Wild West Shows," by Don Russell, *Bandwagon* 15(5), September-October 1971, p. 25; *The Wild West*, by Don Russell, Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas, 1970, pp. 121-127.

96. *The Bulletin*, January 9, 1909:17, February 13, 1909:49.

97. *The Bulletin*, April 17, 1909:18, 20.

98. *The Billboard*, June 12, 1909:35.

99. *The Billboard*, December 11, 1909:73; *New York Clipper*, December 18, 1909:1146.

100. *The Billboard*, March 20, 1909:80.

101. *The Billboard*, February 5, 1910:20, April 9, 1910:19.

102. Letter, Arkansas Land Congress, to Riggs, May 11, 1910, "Great Money Makers," by C. W. Riggs, 1910 (Riggs Scrapbook, private collection, Minneapolis, Minn.); 1910 U. S. Census, Ward 17, St. Louis, Missouri (Roll T624_819, E. D. 0264, pg. 9A).

103. "The Story of an Arkansas Farm," by William R. Lighton, *Saturday Evening Post*, January 22, 1910, pp. 14-15, 27-28.

104. *The Billboard*, January 14, 1911:21, March 18, 1911:76-77, 86, 99.

105. *The Billboard*, September 30, 1911:26, October 21, 1911:26.

106. *The Billboard*, March 16, 1912:26, April 27, 1912:21.

107. *The Billboard*, June 28, 1913:25.

108. Fayetteville Democrat (Ark.), June 5, 1916:1, June 6, 1916:1, June 7, 1916:1, June 8 1916:1; *Arkansas Gazette* (Little Rock, Ark.), June 6, 1916; *Arkansas Democrat* (Little Rock, Ark.), June 6, 1916.

109. *The Billboard*, December 1, 1917:66.



Colorado Bill's show, seen here in 1919, gives a sense of the size of the smaller Wild West shows.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



Health and the Circus: *The Story of the Florence Nightingale Hospital, Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus*

by Hugh Grant Rowell

Originally published in *Hygeia*, August, 1936

Imagine, if you can, a hospital which from mid-April to mid-November travels some 15,000 miles, north, east, south and west, in jumps varying from 14 to 284 miles, serving a traveling community of all classes and big top social castes of some 1,500 persons. That's the "Florence Nightingale," Number 99, the new hospital car of the "Greatest Show on Earth."

The hospital car is part of a fairly complete traveling medical service. In comes the "Squadron," or first train, sometime in the early hours of the morning. Quickly following it is the second section. From this train descends the medical orderly, Mr. Joseph McCarthy, valued aide with years of experience. He goes to the grounds, sets up the medical office and gets everything ready for the Medical Director, Dr. Joseph Bergin.

In comes section three. And finally appears the fourth or performers' train where among sleeping cars named for various states, you will find the "Florence Nightingale," no mean tribute to that Crimean humanitarian.

Car 99 is one of the finest, structurally, on the four trains. It is painted, like the others, a true Pullman green, with the name of the show in gold letters where the word "Pullman" generally appears. The car is of standard length, some 70 to 72 feet, usual for both sleepers and circus cars of all types.

As you look at the sides of the car you wonder how you



enter. There appears to be no door. Entry must be made at the end. Several feet usually devoted to vestibules are incorporated in the interior of the car where every inch of space is needed and used.

Up a short ladder you go, since the car is not attached in the yards to the rest of the train. In through a screen door, and you enter the operating and treatment room. Your escort, if you are an honored guest, may well be famous youthful Joe Dan Miller, in charge of the sleeping cars for some four decades or more. The car is his pride. In the operating room you will meet Miss Daisy Jones, head nurse, in a white uniform with a black band on her cap, and Mrs. Edith Housen, who combines nursing and Southern style cooking as a career. These two nurses are left in charge of the hospital when the doctor and his assistant maintain medical service on the grounds.

The interior of the car is fascinating. If you are fortunate enough to chat briefly with busy Mr. Samuel Gumpertz, general manager of the circus and the Elisha bearing the mantle of the Ringling brothers, circus prophets and leaders, he will smile with pleasure if you like the car. And why not! He designed it, supervised the building in the show's shops at Sarasota, Fla., found a physician to put in charge of the existing medical department, and already has the satisfaction of knowing that another winning feature has been added to the most beloved of his amusement enterprises — a feature, this time that is humanitarian. If you have an opportunity to meet charming and friendly Mrs.



The author, Dr. Hugh Grant Rowell, from the 1937 Ringling program.

The Ringling Museum

standard length, some 70 to 72 feet, usual for both sleepers and circus cars of all types.

As you look at the sides of the car you wonder how you



A view of the *Florence Nightingale*, Car #99, circa 1936.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

Charles Ringling, minister's daughter, widow of one of the five famous brothers, she will tell you that they have wanted the "Florence Nightingale" for some time. Nowhere in the show do you find anything but praise for it. A visitor is amazed at what has been done in the comparatively small space available.

On one side of the entry, inside the car, is a linen and supply closet. Opposite is a wash room and shower bath. The adjacent operating and treatment room, small but well equipped, has the usual table, sterilizers, instrument cases and even an infra-red treatment lamp with which some dozen or more treatments are given a day, for sprains and sore muscles are inescapable in circusland's program of feats of skill and daring.

Down the car, as in Pullman stateroom cars and in European passenger cars, is a corridor at the side. In the wards the passage is at the foot of the beds, which are placed across the car. Between the operating room and the wards is the doctor's stateroom, having a real bed and the usual comforts.

The three wards have three, two and three modern hospital beds, respectively. Special "gadgets" make it possible to raise the heads of the beds and make various other adjustments as in any good hospital. Each patient has an individual locker, chart board and push button for service. Wash bowls and a flush toilet are available; in the latter there are special sterilization possibilities, if needed, and the container is concealed in a special compartment in the

"possum belly" under the car. This "attic" is built as a cellar and has as vast a capacity as attics do in most homes "on land."

Next to the wards, at the other end of the car, comes the kitchen, planned like that in a modern city apartment. The nurses' boudoir is at this end of the car.

Overhead are tanks holding some 450 gallons of water, which is changed daily. Lighting is by electricity. Electric fans are supplied at strategic points, assuring, with the doors and windows, satisfactory ventilation. Heating is by portable oil stoves; coolness, not warmth, is the usual problem in a circus car.

The pleasing decorative scheme is aluminum gray and purple. The wall color is aluminum. All curtains for windows and cubicles are purple. The cubicle curtains, as in a modern hospital ward, are suspended from metal frames and make it possible to give each bed all the privacy that is needed.

The "Florence Nightingale," throughout, leaves you with the impression of its simplicity, practicability, attractiveness and thorough planning.

Why does a circus need a hospital car? The answer lies in observing the medical service "on the lot."

In the "back yard" the "back of the show" activities are carried on. Here performers have their individual or community dressing tents and wagons, and here they live and eat during the day. In easy access you will find a tent which is the busiest spot in the private streets of the circus – in

the Village of Spangleland. This is the doctor's office and, in earlier days, someone often painted a crude "DOC" on the sidewall.

The waiting room is beneath a canopy about 12 feet square, separated by a canvas partition from a treatment room about 6 by 12 feet where may be seen the instrument table, cot and specially devised trunks for carrying medical equipment and supplies. Except for the lack of magazines of doubtful age and interest, the use of portable chairs and the circus atmosphere about, you might well be in any medical office.

This medical service on the grounds is comprehensive. New employees are examined. The circus does not want to add persons with heart trouble, ruptures and contagious diseases, including venereal disease. So it eliminates them from the start. In addition to the work of the sanitary department, which uses army methods, and in addition to the huge sterilizing dish washer, which is carried on a special wagon and does dishes for about 4,500 meals a day, the medical officer provides and requires routine protection against smallpox, typhoid and paratyphoid fever.

First aid service is provided to meet the needs of the twenty to thirty thousand daily patrons of the show, any of whom, in spite of precautions, might require first aid as a result of fainting or an accident. Safety methods galore plus the superior ability of circus employees to control crowds keep down the injuries. There are also to be remembered those racketeers who either fake accidents or exaggerate the slightest hurt. Here, for legal as well as professional rea-

sons, the importance of a show physician is recognizable, if only to insure fair play to all concerned.

And now about the service to the show's personnel in times of illness or accidents. It is generally agreed that circus employees, as a group, are of a physically superior type. From professional if not moral necessity the performer leads a generally clean cut life. And spends much of it outdoors. The food in the cookhouse on the Big One, both under the late Ollie Webb and the present steward, Mr. Blood, is excellent, and the menus would meet the approval of any nutritionist. A recent dinner consisted of clam chowder, codfish or mackerel with potatoes and green vegetables, slaw salad, fancy cake, with the usual accessories in drinks, bread and butter and condiments. Lettuce salads are sometimes served. Delicious baked custard puddings, with a touch of whipped cream on top have appeared as desserts. Variety is excellent, and there is always plenty of everything. The sterilizing dish washer adds another health feature.

Since one cannot control the weather, respiratory diseases are one source of illness, and injuries of the athletic. Types - sprains, strains, and even fractures - form the other common source of indispositions. Any other type of illness, however, may occur, and the circus must be prepared for it.

Here the "Florence Nightingale" becomes of real service. Previously it has been necessary to leave behind, in good hands, all but the mildly sick or injured. There they were, in strange communities, far from their tented home



Nurses look after patients in the hospital car.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



Dr. Joseph Bergin treats aerialist Ellie Ardely on the lot.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

and friends. Car 99 makes possible improved service at lower cost. For, in addition to running up heavy hospital and medical bills, the temporarily deserted performer, who is often an important feature in the program, may not return to retraining and actual work as soon as possible. Furthermore, it costs a great deal of money to transport the patient back to a show that is making mighty jumps all over the country.

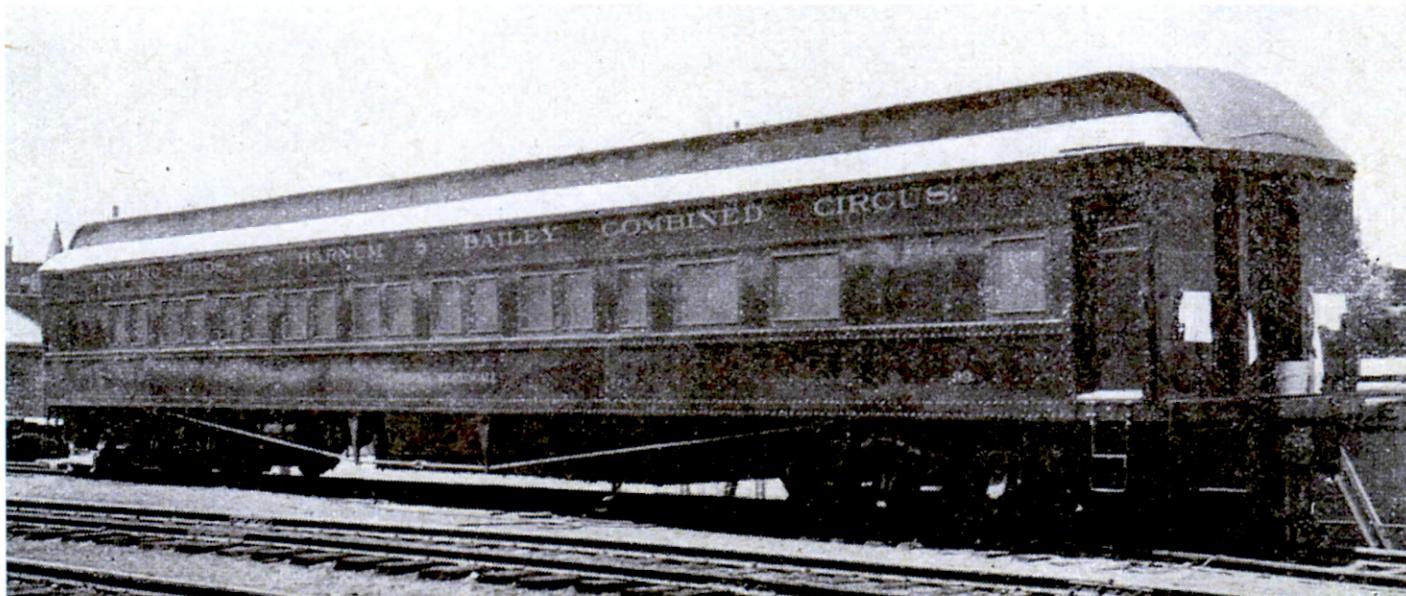
Many patients, hitherto left behind, may now remain "with it," under their own family doctor in their own community hospital; for a circus is after all only a big village. Certain patients will still require special hospitalization and consultation service beyond what the show can make available from its own medical resources. Here enters the professional judgment of the circus doctor, as in the case of any family physician. Inevitably the patients with serious cases must still stay behind. Nor can those with contagious disease be carried. They must remain behind in quarantine.

Today the costs of medical service and hospitalization and how to meet them are always of interest. Here in the circus is a situation resembling that found in communities where a doctor has been procured and underwritten and provided with a suitable hospital. In the circus the augmented medical service is too new to have a fixed plan for meeting costs. Previously, sometimes, as on a ship, stated fees have been charged by the physician. At other times, some sort of weekly payment has been made to underwrite the costs, as in the present ten-cents-a-week hospital plans.

While the new medical service on the Big One has already made good in terms of performance, time will be needed for cost analyses, though there is little doubt that it will give better service for less money than the previous systems.

Little has ever been told of circus health programs. Even though existing, they are missed by the visitor whose interest characteristically is in the glitter, glamour and amazing skills and feats in the arena. Furthermore, back yard life is and should be private. Even that erudite story hunter Roland Butler, general press representative, respects the private life of this community in a manner not found in other amusement circles. Nor, interestingly enough, have circus doctors, from the late pioneering and beloved Williams Shields to the present incumbent, sought or even desired personal spots in the limelight. Theirs, they have felt, is the privilege of service. They have, according to professional confreres, done well. Great clinicians like the late Neil Hoskins of Detroit have even served as locum tenens. As with all family doctors – and that's what they are – circus medical directors have the satisfaction of knowing they have their own peculiar place in the hearts of their community.

That, after all, is what every physician desires above all else, whether he has his own practice and little hospital or whether he tours the country with the first circus hospital, the "Florence Nightingale," as medical director of the enormous caravan which has come, to most people, to be the true exemplification of the word "circus," the distinctively American amusement. **BW**



The Florence Nightingale as show in the 1937 program for the Ringling show.

The Ringling Museum



Jackie LeClaire with his father, Jack LeClair on the Ringling lot in 1947.

The Ringling Museum Tibbals Collection

Remembering Life

with the Greatest Show on Earth

by Jackie LeClaire



Welcome and thanks so much for reading this... As long as my memories are, I have sincerely tried to condense them. So many things I just hate to pass over. Remember, these are memories from the 1920s, with interludes up into the mid-1940s.

Even in my memories, I have never been able to shake the sound of circus band music. I can still hear Merle Evans, the very famous bandmaster playing circus music. The long slides I hear from the trombones are called trombone smears, typical of circus music. I was brought up on this kind of music. As a child, they used to play those trombone smears in my ears, instead of "Rock a Bye Baby."

What I am going to do is start out by telling you how I became involved in the circus in the first place. Everything I say is the very truth, as far as I can remember. I am not an historian, but so many things just stick out in my mind.

In the 1920s, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey did street parades in each town. They were in the mornings at 9:30 on whatever was the main street of the town. The parade would leave the lot about 9 A.M. They would later return to the lot in time for lunch and to make the afternoon show.

This parade was done every morning, except when they stayed more than one day in a town. You have to remember

that there was no radio advertising in those days. Radio advertising made its debut in New York City in August of 1922. The circus had a crew of men that preceded the show to billboard and poster anything they could, often covering the entire side of a building to let everyone know when it would be circus day.

Almost everyone in the parade was mounted, that is riding an animal or riding on a wagon float. Only a very few would walk because they had to hold the lead ropes on some of the animals, like zebras and camels. It would have been pretty tough to walk all the way back and forth from the lot, and still be able to perform two shows that day.

My father was a clown and acrobat, playing both roles in the show. His friend Felix Adler later became quite a famous clown. Felix and my dad just happen to be out of makeup, riding horses and wearing gorgeous costumes in the parade.

In contrast, my mother came from a Canadian French family in New Bedford, Massachusetts. They were very poor, working in the cotton mills at very little pay and long hours. I believe my mother was already working at 14 years old.

Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, (which I will refer to as just Ringling from now on) played New Bedford, Massachusetts, my mother's home town one day. My moth-

er said to her sister, Peggy, "Let's go downtown and see the parade," which they did.

They saw a porch on a house where the parade was going to pass. They rang the bell and asked the lady if they could sit on her porch and watch the parade. The woman said, "Why not?" So up they went and sat.

My mother and her sister were in their mid-20s and were quite excited that the parade was going to pass by them. When Felix Adler and my dad came along in the parade, they immediately spied the two girls and waved at them. My mother was shy, but waved back, and the parade passed on.

After my mother and Peggy finished work that day, they went down to the lot. They could always at least look at the beautiful costumes and performers and the activity on the lot. That was free.

Well, what do you know, Felix and my dad spotted the two girls in the crowd on the circus lot and approached them. This was just before the evening show. They figured they would make points with the girls that way. Felix said, "Hi! Remember us, we were the two guys that waved to you in the parade." In those days it was not proper for town girls to mix with circus people. Then he added quickly, "Are you going to see the circus?" My mother answered "Oh my gosh no, we don't have the money, we can't afford to go the circus show." So my dad and Felix said "We'll put you in. We'll get you a seat." So they put them in the circus tent.

It was the first circus they had ever seen. It was like going to heaven seeing all the performers, elephants, costumes, five acts working at the same time in three rings and four stages, band music, daredevils, and the man on the flying trapeze. They were both thrilled and excited. To them it

was like an incredible dream.

After the show Felix and dad took them out to a local café which served clam boils, meat pies, and also beer. It was exciting for the girls. Then the time came to an end. Felix and my dad had to get back to the circus train and my mother and her sister had to get home to be able to get to work early the next morning.

My father said, "Tomorrow we are going to be in Fall River, and I understand they have a trolley car that runs between these two towns. Why don't you come to see us tomorrow night in Fall River?" The two towns were about 14 miles apart.

The sisters said "Oh yes," but they had no intention of going. However as they were walking home they started thinking. They both agreed that these guys did not look anything like those guys that work with them in the mill. My mother said, "They're good lookin' and have such nice muscles. Let's go, but don't tell mom."

The next day, like usual, they came home from work. The family all sat down together. The sisters had it all set up. One of them said to their mother, "Ma! Is it ok if we go to a show tonight?" That meant a movie in those days, and Ma said, "Yes that's ok. But don't be too late." Heavens, remember these sisters were in their middle twenties.

So they hopped on the trolley car and went to Fall River. Well my dad had been in vaudeville and circuses since 1912. He was a good looking man. He had been with many women and showgirls over the years, not counting the girls already on the show now with him, and guess what? The very second night he met my mother Edna, he asked her to marry him. She said "Yes" immediately. All of her sisters would have been willing to marry any man just to get out of the house. They were so poor and with a grumpy father and several other sisters still living at home. Dad must have seen something in her that he just didn't see in the show girls.

Naturally, she never thought that he would ever come back and marry her, and never told her mother. Well when the circus closed the 1920 season, the show went back to their winter quarters, which at that time was in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Dad took the New York, New Haven and Hartford railway train on to New Bedford, Mass. There he met her French Canadian family. They were married in a Catholic Church on January 20, 1921. By the way, I was not born until 1927.

Dad took Edna, my mother, on the road that season off to the rehearsals for the 1921 season show in Madison Square Garden in New York City. Remember, John



Felix Adler and Jack LeClair with a young Jackie.

Author's Collection



A performer relaxes in his berth on the train, circa 1945.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

Ringling did not buy the winter quarters here in Sarasota until 1927.

My mother was a very fun woman, always up and very liked by all. I guess that's what dad saw in her. That and, by the way, she had a very nice figure.

There is a story that she told about the first time she tried on a circus costume before all the show girls in the dressing room in Madison Square. When she started to disrobe, she displayed woolen underwear. The show girls could not help but laugh. My mother stood up on her trunk and with her little French accent, simply smiled and said. "You can laugh all you want, but it keeps my arse warm." Everyone howled with laughter, as did she, and she was forever woven into their hearts. To be really loved on circuses, you have to be a good sport and take a joke, and laugh with the rest of them, to be truly loved and accepted

Eventually they wanted to have a child, but it wasn't a priority on the list. They hoped one day to have a girl, and already picked my name, "May." When traveling with the circus, it isn't easy with children. Small children did not get a special place, but had to sleep in the same bed bunk with their parents.

Our country was in prohibition and as there was no morning after pill at that time, my mother used something

called the "Rhythm Theory." That seemed to work well until they played Canada. Canada was not dry. They got into that black horse ale, forgot all about the Rhythm Theory, and I was conceived. I am a true product of Black Horse Ale.

Now we can get back to our main topic: Life with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in the mid-40s. I joined in 1944.

We lived in railway cars that we called coaches. They were actually sleeper cars, kinda like the old Pullmans. They were wood coaches. They were the old hospital cars from the First World War. We did not get the steel coaches until about 1947, and they were the hospital cars from the Second World War.

The only privacy you had for the entire year was when you got into your berth with the curtain entirely

closed. That was it. We did not have a "Sergeant of Arms"; but there would always be some cranky clown that would stick his head out of the curtain and grumble with a dirty look that quieted every one down. It was a self-ruled system.

When you are on the road with the circus, you are usually only one day in a town and living in train freight yards. Now a lot of the younger folks happen to have romantic inclinations. If you had a girlfriend, she was most likely living in the girls' car down the track. You're always in freight yards, not train stations. After a while, those empty stock cars get to look like "Motel 6." They ship things in freight cars. It is dark in them and you never know what might have been shipped in them.

One night we were all sitting around in the vestibule "jack potting," crowded as it usually is at night after the show. One guy entered the coach train door and passed quietly through the group. He opened the curtain over the entrance to the berth section, said a "Good night," and passed through the curtain. Suddenly everyone got very quiet and just looked at each other with a question on their faces. The guy was all covered with white baking flour.

Well, I'll tell you, it didn't take long the next day to find out what girl came in her sleeping car covered with white



A performer shows off the improvements to his berth on the train, circa 1945.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

baking flower. As I said "no privacy," but everyone just laughed about it. It was never a problem.

The berth we lived in was our home, and we tried to make it individual. Remember contact paper? Well some of the men, but mostly the women, would cover what little walls they had with contact paper. The bottom wood of the bunk above was their ceiling, and was often covered with colorful contact paper. You could change the window curtains if you wished.

Almost everyone had one of those long cloth shoe hangers hung at the foot of their berth. They could use it to put in their tooth paste, shaving cream, ointments and all the necessary things they possibly could get into them. Shelves were a no-no as the moving train knocked everything off anyhow.

Some had a berth box, which was wood with one shelf inside, and a hinged door that opened out from top to bottom for larger things, with a snap clasp over the metal closure or a lock.

All your clothing was hung from the same bar that held the berth curtain. Beneath each lower berth were two pull out drawers. One for the upper berth and one for the lower berth. There were no storage closets in the coach. No extra storage place at all, so if you joined the show that season with suitcases, there was no place to put them. My father

used to always come with boxes he picked up at the markets. He would unload everything, and throw away the boxes. At the end of the season, he would look for boxes and reverse the procedure.

We traveled every night except when we had lay overs. That's an expression for staying in a town for more than one day. We sometimes had a two day stand and often a week stand in bigger cities like Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia, Los Angeles, etc. A stand is a show word for staying in a particular location and not traveling on that day.

You would get so used to the movement of the train. You would go to bed, and believe me, as tired as you were after a day outside in the fresh air and the work you put in, you would wake up and think, "Gee, the train hasn't moved yet, has it?" And guess what?...

you were already in the next town.

I have a lot of trouble in traveling today because as soon as the bus or train or plane starts to move, with the noise and all, I get sleepy. The electrical generators, both on the lot and on the train, seemed always to be heard and lulled me to sleep.

It was never really important what town you were in. You had a route card with names of the places you would play, but unless you had somebody coming to visit you, it didn't make any difference what town you were in. Your town was the circus lot that you were playing on that day. That was your hometown, so to speak. Often times we would have to ask some "local" passing by, "What town is this?"

In the morning you would have two wash basins on your end of the car. You had cold water on the lot and cold water on the train. There was a large long tank that was strapped over head in the train and the water came down into the pipes by gravity feed. Every day the water truck would come down beside the train and drag an old garden type hose out, open up a cap on top of the coach, and shove the hose down into the tank. As they say in traveling "the water is non portable." "Don't drink the water." There were no electric shavers back then. All the men had a mug, a brush, and shaving soap that foamed up when you mixed

the brush around in that nice cold water that we had. Only a few staterooms on the train had propane stoves so they could at least heat water.

This all got a little testy during the last months of the season which often went into October and early November playing in the Carolinas. It could get pretty cold. Our cars of course had no heat. Summer brought another challenge. Air conditioning in the cars was unheard of. The circus train generators produced direct current, so fans were out too. I remember in 1947 in hot Texas we played Port Arthur, a very large port. One of our old clowns, Myron Orton went to town just to look around. There were many second hand boat supply stores. Myron was rummaging through one of them when he came upon some fans that ran on direct current. Evidently the old ships had only direct current. He bought a fan and took it back to the train and hooked it up in his berth immediately. Word travels fast, others got wind of it, including myself, and by the time we left there wasn't a DC fan left in the ship shops of Port Arthur.

What a joy that was for the rest of the season. Later with the newer steel coach cars coming in, we changed the DC generators to AC, then all was well...wonderful memories.

We sort of all looked at the adversities in the coaches with the attitude: "Well, at least we're dry and not wet. We

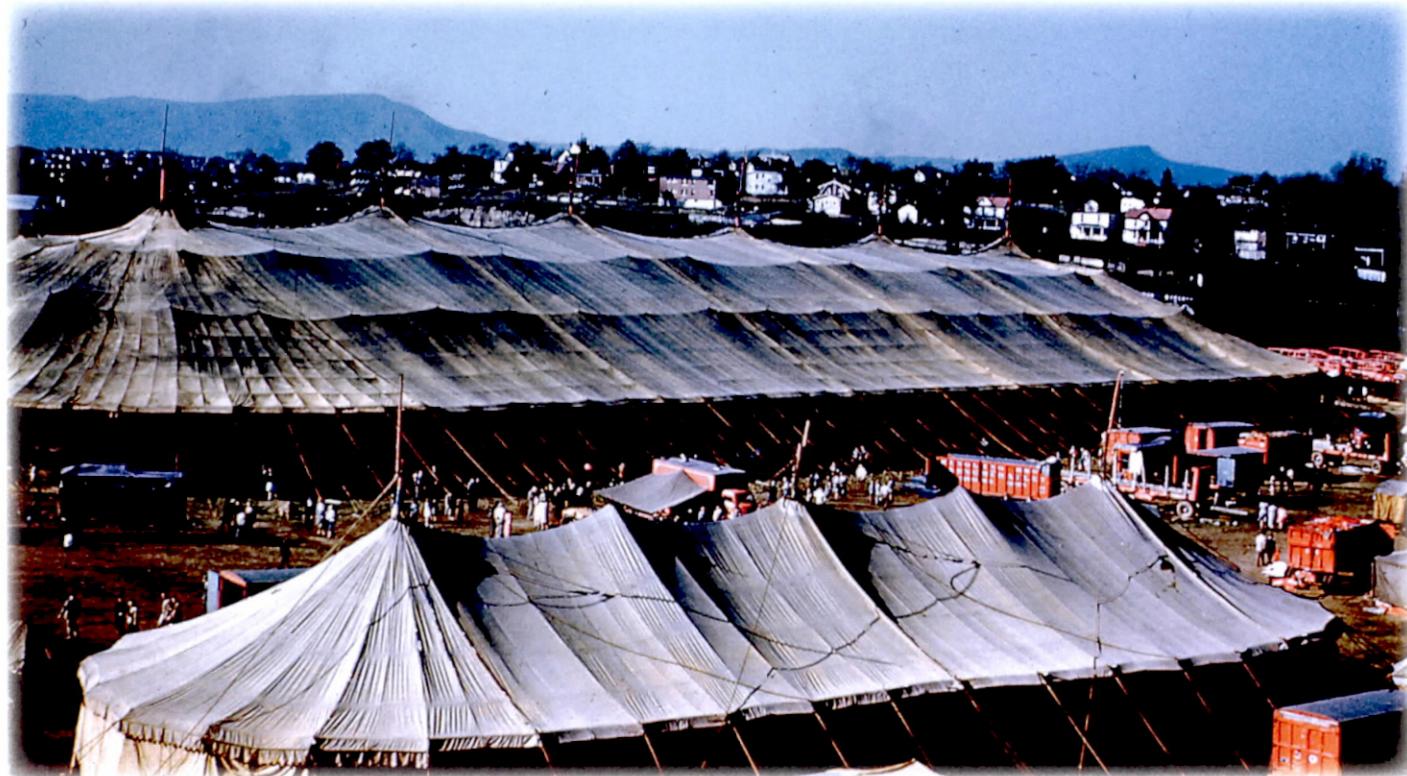
have a place to sleep and we are fed. We did not always have that luxury when we were working in the tents on the lot."

We all needed to get to the circus lot from the train. Sometimes the train would be very close. Everyone already knew what towns were close to the lot so we could walk. Very often right down the tracks.

In just recent years here in Sarasota, I came across some railroad tracks, just at the end of Aspinwall Street so I walked them just for memories. I was surprised to note that my walking gate was exactly the length between the ties. I was really surprised. I knew then where my gate came from.

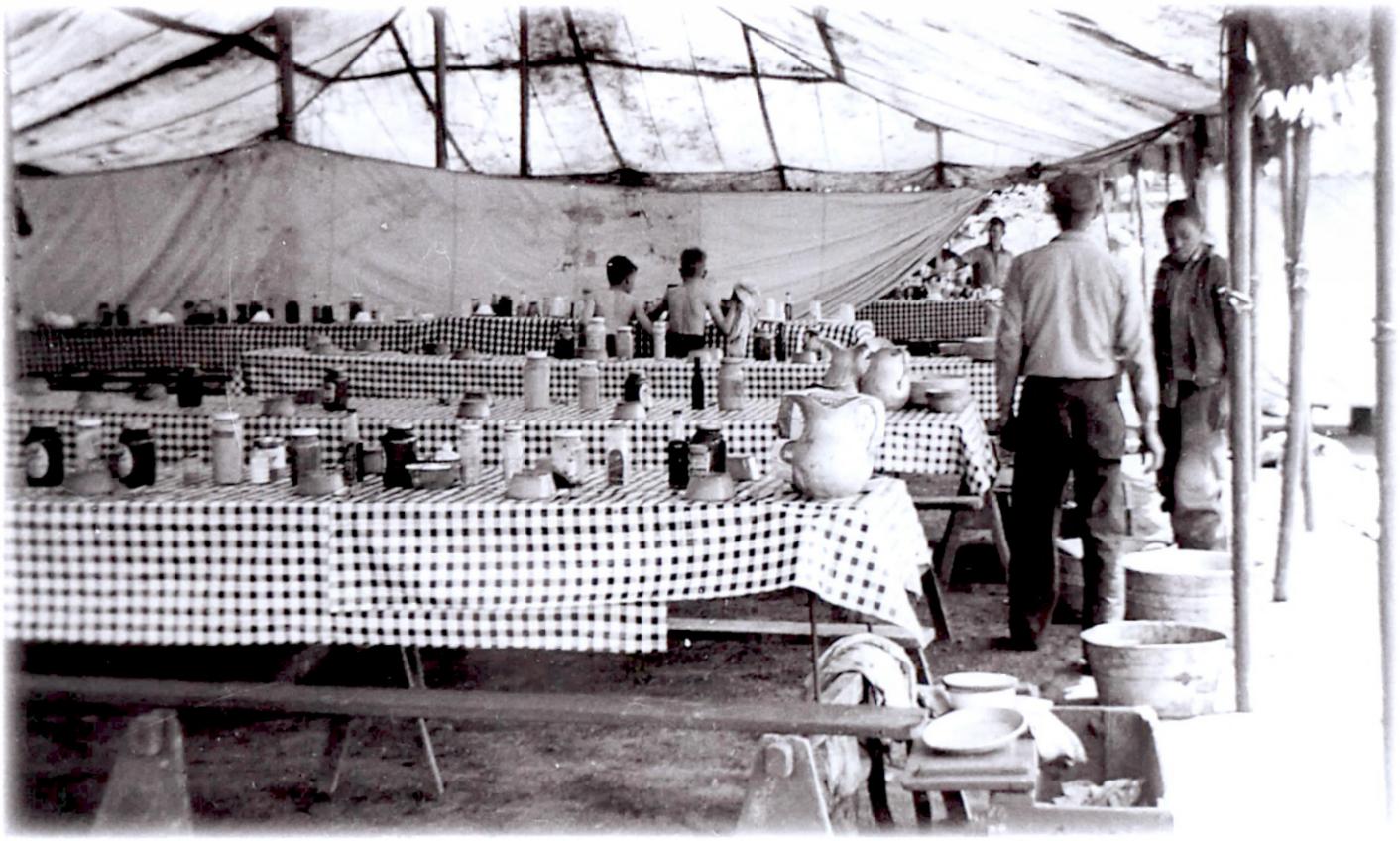
Ringling did have a bus called the "Gilly," an old school bus. I believe it was loaded on the flat train cars to get from town to town. It was not new and fancy and we did have to pay 10 cents a ride. That was about 50 cents today, but it was worth it. It was fun coming home to the train on a rainy night. The heated odor of the performers and work crew, the wonderful aroma of the animal workers, all packed together in a very hot bus. Ah! The memories, the memories!!

The cook house as we called it, although it actually was a cook tent, served three meals a day: breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The breakfast was very early. The cook house was



The Ringling backyard and big top setup in Roanoke, Virginia, 1946.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection



The Ringling Bros. cook house, circa 1942.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

one of the first tents to go up on the lot. The big top crew, and working men were extremely hungry in the morning. They had started before sunrise and had also put up the cook tent.

The cook tent had a lot to set up as there were stoves, dishwashers, picnic type tables, red gingham table cloths, etc. Hot cakes were cooked by the hundreds, those working men had big appetites. They always fed the working men first in the mornings.

The cook tent's lunch was about noon and dinner between shows could vary around five o'clock depending on whether the show was on time or not. There were always two entrees. You were sat depending upon, what I guess you'd call it the "echelon" you were in. The staff and the high monkey-monks sat in the first tables close to the entrance, then came the front door men (the men who handled the money and the tickets for the show), the band, the side show people, the flying acts, the performing acts, and then way at the far end of the tent were the clowns.

The food was the same for everyone. Milk was available for a weekly charge to a man named Whitey, and always put in an aluminum bowl filled with ice. Many years later, the general manger confessed that is was just another way for

Whitey to make a buck, as the show paid for the milk. The waiters paid for all the condiments they had on each table so really needed the tips we gave each week.

The cook house was divided by a sidewall near the center of the tent. On the left side of the sidewall sat all the working men, animal men, big top crew, etc. Fourth of July has always been our unofficial circus holiday of the year. On that day and that day only, the side wall was taken down and we all ate together. They always tried to have a special steak on that meal and they always served strawberry short cake on that day. Small American flags were attached to all the sidewall poles and the sidewall itself was dropped pretty much open on that day.

If the shows ran on time they expected the clowns to remove their makeup between shows unless the shows times were running late. In those years, it was beginning to run late, more or less because of how the railroad handled the show.

In earlier days, men had to wear a coat and women were not allowed in with shorts or pants, they needed a dress. In later time it was pretty casual.

With different lots, we never knew where the cook house would be, but when it did park next to the horse



Men in the Ringling dressing tent, circa 1936.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

tops, at least we always knew where the flies came from.

The dressing room was always as close to the big top as possible, because that is where most of us dressed, unless you were a Celebrity Star. Later on we dressed under the seat wagons. When I first went with Ringling Bros. they did not have seat wagons. All the seating equipment had to be assembled piece by piece.

Seat wagons were specially built wagons with all the seats already assembled into a grand stand. When they opened them up for the day's performance, we were able to dress beneath them in the big top. When moving, the seat wagons were all folded up again into wagons that could be pulled to and loaded on the circus train that night.

In the mid-1940s we dressed in the dressing tent, also referred to as the dressing room. It was quite a large tent and was divided in the middle by two sidewalls running across with quite a space in the center. The center was called the connection. It held the wagons that carried the big production number costumes. Most of your personal costumes for your act could be packed in your trunk, but the show stuff had to be returned to the main wardrobe wagons after the performances, especially the night show.

As you faced the entrance of the tent opening, the women were always on the left side and the men on the right. Each performer had a trunk. Mine was a Taylor trunk, very famous in the vaudeville and early circus days. They were set up to create aisles, with trunks facing each other in each aisle. Once again the flying acts were closest to the exit, with performers and acts following behind and of course the clowns were the furthest from the exit. Well, let's face it. It is a tent and anywhere you decided to lift the sidewall, it was an exit.

The men all had metal pipe racks that could hold some of their costumes and a makeup mirror, the ladies had very few racks and just put their makeup mirrors on their trunks.

Everyone got two buckets of water a day. The wardrobe department brought the water and we tipped them each week. You could always, at the start of the season, go to a hardware store and buy a cheap bucket. However the wardrobe men sold more expensive, good, solid, heavy buckets. It was kind of funny the bad luck that befell buckets bought elsewhere. It always seemed like the cheaper ones that you bought would end up with a metal stake running a hole through them or being run over by a truck. It was much



Women hang laundry on the circus lot, circa 1940.

The Ringling Museum, Tibbals Collection

luckier to buy them from the wardrobe guys.

The buckets were placed in front of your trunk and everyone had rigged a soap dish to hang on the side of the bucket. One bucket was for wash and one for rinse, especially with the clowns. Ivory soap was the favorite soap, as it was white. You could see it and it floated. Throwing the bucket out in the dirt was the end of any soap that went with it. Now you have to remember that water in a traveling outdoor circus is a very precious commodity. We worked out in fields, rocky covered grounds, actual corn fields, or recently harvested fields, and where ever the circus tents would fit. There is no water anywhere and it had to all be brought in by tank trucks.

We respected water like gold. You could always get more water by going over to the horse tops where the water trucks were generally kept. We did not carry water for the elephants. The elephants were walked to the water wagons.

They had no laundry car on the show, you had to do all your own washing. We would have to get to the lot early in the morning to do wash-

ing, and hang it on clothes lines we carried in our trunks that we tied between the tent guy ropes. All the time praying that it did not rain and would be dry before dark. Plastic bags were not available at that time and we used to make bags out of oil cloth. Remember them as table cloths? We could then pack it away if it was still wet, hang it out the next day in the next town.

Oh, yes, every once in a while we had to take a bath. We never bathed in the buckets in front of our trunks as that would make the ground muddy, so we would pick up the two buckets and a towel and go over by the sidewall. It was no problem, if you happened to be very shy, you simply turned around and faced the sidewall while you bathed. Anyone who ever was with a circus, knows how precious water can be.

Women had the worst problem on wash day as they all had those flimsy lingerie things. Very often the big top crew, already sweaty and wet when they came by, would just simply walk through the lingerie bare chested as they guyed out the tent. That was indeed a lovely situation.

Almost every performer had a butterfly type chair. They were wood, built with joints that moved and the chair parts would open up. There was a canvas cover that you kept separately in your trunk. You would hook the ends over the chair, extend the legs and the chair became kinda like a small hammock. The wardrobe department would pack the wood part away in one of the possum bellies of a wagon and bring them to you the next day. A possum belly



Margie and Joe Geiger, 1948.

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is the storage box under a circus wagon. Yes, there was a charge for this about 25 cents a week. Remember money had more value then.

Most "First of May" clowns got about \$30 a week but my dad, being on a father and son contract, was able to pay me \$40.

There was a big shortage of workers during this time of the Second World War. At the time, we all did have a chance to make a little extra money. I remember in 1944 that the male performers loaded all the men and women's trunks. Male help was short during the war years. We all had a partner loading the trunks. My partner was Joe Geiger, one of the original Wallendas. We would first load the men's trunks from the dressing room. That would let the ladies have a little more time after working the elephant number finale, to clean up in their buckets. There were very few places on the train, unless you had a state room, to freshen up.

We loaded rain or shine. We all carried rubber coats and hats and boots back and forth every day from the train, so that we would be prepared for the worst. Even when it was raining cats and dogs, we would carry the trunks to a wagon that had men inside who took the trunks and loaded them. No camel back trunks were ever allowed as they could not stack them. Then we would drop the wet canvas of the dressing room tent and roll it up into a pile. Thank goodness the truck had a winch to lift it up on to a wagon.

Doing this kind of work on a circus is called "cherry pie," because you are paid extra for it. The next day Pat Valdo, the Director of Personnel, would come around and pay you cash from his hand. We performers also set up the two stages in-between the rings in the big top. The performers who worked on the stages also helped and were happy doing it. They took the care to make them strong and level, a must for most of the working acts especially when you were on a rough lot. As I remember it, for all the cherry pie we each got a total of \$7 a day. I was only getting \$40 a week pay and this added up to \$49 dollars more a week, clear, and no taxes. Not bad.

Concession men traveling with the circus had to help put up the seats. At that time they were all pieced together: stingers, bibles, chairs and wood frames. They did not get paid for that. It was part of their extra job. They called the work "Chinese."

When you are on a circus, like Ringling, you need a wrist watch to get you to the lot on time, but once there, a



Clown Jack LeClair, circa 1945.

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watch is pretty useless. A half hour before show time, one of the musicians would sound the bugle call several places on the lot. Then, fifteen minutes before show time, he would repeat the bugle call again, then five minutes before show time he would play a much more active bugle call that was sure to remind everyone that they better get with it, the show starts in five minutes.

Once the show started, only the circus band music would tell you the time. It only took a few days to become familiar with the band music, knowing which act is on, how long it's been on, and if something has happened in the act to create a quick change or there is an emergency. If you followed that act, you had better get moving. It is a circus tradition that in a serious emergency, to warn everyone to be on guard, the circus band would play "Stars and Stripes Forever." Such was the situation in Hartford, Connecticut on July 6, 1944 when the tent caught fire and 168 people lost their lives. I won't get into that at this time, as that is a



The Ringling lot with a sidewalled menagerie, circa 1946.

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whole story in itself.

Sometimes, Gunther Wallenda and some of us younger performers would get together and sing or hum the entire show music from start to finish. After all, we were teenagers. As I said, everyone just automatically learned the score to the whole show after a few days. It lingered in your brain. Well, let's face it, the music played throughout the entire performance with no intermission.

Naturally circus people, like anyone else, will have arguments and most of them seemed to happen in the dressing tent. My father always spoke about an acrobatic and horse riding act that only worked 15 minutes in the big top ring and would come out and argue for a half hour. Many other performing duos and group acts seem to have the same problem if something went wrong.

We also had private arguments. Of course we only heard the men's side of the dressing room. At the first sound of a brawl, everyone else would become dead quiet to hear it all. It never led to much more than that, but it was great entertainment for all the rest of us.

I learned this lesson very early in my dressing tent career. One time, during my first year, I sassed my father. He

hauled off and gave me a flat smack against the face which could be heard all over the men's dressing room. In his very strong voice that really carried, he said to me, "You may be 16, but you're still my son, and you will obey me."

The whole dressing tent went silent. I was so embarrassed. I hated my father in that moment. Today I love him more for that moment than anything else. I realized later what a wonderful father he was and how much it must have hurt him to reprimand me at that time.

The dressing tent had an unwritten code of ethics. Willie Mossier who had a comedy mule act was also our mail man. He went to the local post office every day to pick up our mail. He was also our sergeant at arms. If you swore in the dressing room, you had to pay a fine. I remember it was 25 cents. If you didn't want to pay the fine, you would lean over Willie Mossier's lap, and he would give you the hose. It was never anything sadistic, just fun. It was just fun for all of us. If you don't have a good sense of humor traveling with a circus, you might just as well go home. The money went to help when someone was in need.

Circus people have, believe it or not, very high morals. They would have to, working so closely together and having no privacy at all. Everyone knew your character and what

you were doing, at all times. It really bugs me when I see movies and television where circus people are depicted like they are drunks and alcoholics. No one could execute their skilled acts under those conditions. I remember a man and wife sometimes had an argument just before going into the ring. Their music would play, they would walk out into the ring with big smiles, climb up the rigging, hold one another by the teeth, spin each other around, come down to the ground, take a delightful smiling bow to the audience, at each other, leave the arena, and start arguing again. I guess we all do a little of that at times in every family.

I did a lot of intense research when I was working in Advance of the Ringling in publicity for the show as the Ambassador of Mirth. I could not find any performer or act from Europe or anywhere that could ever remember anyone ever cutting ropes, or ever doing anything to hurt or injure anyone while working in a circus act. Even the knife throwing acts never heard of anything like that. It simply was never done.

Circus is family. I once was talking to Mary Ruth Herriott, a horse trainer and performer, about when she had children on the road. She constantly washed diapers by hand in buckets, and hung them out to dry. She still did her performances. Remember they did not have disposable diapers back then. Even considering all the hard work she did, she told me she never had any regrets. Family acts take great pride in raising their children and protecting the reputation of their family's circus heritage.

By the way, before they had mail order schooling, every circus had someone who was able to hold classes with the children each day. Albert White, one of the clowns, did it on Ringling between shows.

Famous center ring aerialist Lillian Leitzel loved children, and would baby sit children while their parents were in the big top. I was on the Ringling show at one year of age, and do not remember, but others tell me that she baby sat me, and many other children while our parents were in the big top performing. That is the way it works on most circuses with children. An act will baby sit for parents who are in the big top and vice versa. They all help each other. It's a family thing.

In my day, the mid 1940s, clowns began making up just before the show started to be ready for their first call. Only a few clowns, like Emmett Kelly and Otto Griebling, worked at what we call the "Come In." That's when the people are entering the big top. Unless they had an opening production number with clowns, we never entered the big top un-



An H. A. Atwell photograph of Lillian Leitzel in her tent.

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til possibly the fifth or sixth number. Some didn't even start making up till the show started. Contrary to what has often been said about time to makeup, most professional clowns made up rather quickly. You have to remember, most of them made up twice a day, as the show frowned on eating in makeup unless the time was short.

The dressing tent was always as close to the big top as possible because everyone had to run back and forth from the performance to make costume changes. It was not always bright sunny days, but also wind, rain and mud. Yes, it was difficult at times but we all smiled. I see many photos of my friend Mary Jane Miller, on Ringling from 1942 to 1954. Many of those photos were taken while she was walking through mud, but she's always smiling. Sometimes the dressing room ground was already muddy before we arrived, and we would have to stand up on our trunks to change costumes. Hay and sawdust was laid down over the muddy areas to give us a dryer place to walk. Not only did we clowns keep in shape running back and forth to the big top, but every time we came to the dressing tent we were changing complete costumes. Sometime when you have nothing to do, try changing your complete clothing ten or twelve times, and running back and forth like the clowns and performers had to do. No one wanted to miss their number. That is a real "No No" around a circus. My dad always told me if you are going to miss a number, make it a Clown Number as there were so many clowns in the arena



Mary Jane Miller on the Ringling lot, 1946.

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moving around, it might not be noticed. However with the big, costumed production numbers, a person missing could easily be spotted. Everyone had a certain space to fill. The production numbers, the spec, (the parade in the tent), the manège (horse number), the aerial display (all girls up in the air), and the Finale (closing number) had just about everyone in them. Each production number had themes like Alice in Wonderland, Birthdays, Christmas etc. All numbers carefully worked with specially designed costumes, music, and choreographed routines. Management was always watching to see that you did it correctly, were dressed properly, and were in the right place.

The clowns were in the big top a lot, back and forth anywhere from 10 to 15 times, more than any of the other performers. The very famous P.T. Barnum said "Clowns are the pegs on which the circus is hung."

Every circus had midgets and dwarfs, now referred to as little people, a spectacle that is considered politically incorrect today. I do not remember any little people who ever worked on the circus that ever complained about their

stature. Of course you have to remember that in the circus everyone was equally treated, including, now another word not politically correct, the freaks of the side show.

Both afternoon and evening shows generally ran about two hours. Between shows the whole lot would get a little quieter with only the sound of the side show talkers and the bally music of the side show

Performers and working men would head to the cook house for the dinner. There was a pennant-shaped flag that was hoisted over the cook house tent to announce that it was open. I really do not know why, but it had the word "HOTEL" printed on it. No one got into the cook tent unless that flag was up, once it went down, there was no entry. Lateness was no excuse. You have to remember the circus ran like a well-oiled machine and discipline was very important.

The working men would try to get a little shut eye some place in the time between shows as they had a heavy night of work coming up. Most of the performers pulled out their butterfly chairs and this was the time to really "Cut Up Jack Pots," sharing memories and stories. Often when the shows were too close together because the train arrived late, all the clowns would leave their makeup on and the girls would run over to their boyfriends, or vise versa for a little conversation as to what had happened so far that day. It was always a treat if there was a little convenience store close by to run over for some ice cream. We would often buy it all out.

Otto Griebling loved telling the story about when his boss Albert Hodgini sent him out with a dollar bill between shows to bring him back a loaf of bread and a quart of milk. Otto went to the grocery store and he happen to see a hardware store next to it. He went in to look around and got to talking with the owner. Otto was quite young then and he poured his heart out about how difficult Albert was to work for, especially training with him to do bareback riding. The owner felt sorry for him and said "You're not happy with the circus. I'll give you a job." Otto took the job. He worked in the hardware store for a year. The circus came back to the same town the next year. Otto, I guess, had enough of selling nuts and bolts, so he went to the grocery store, bought a loaf of bread and a quart of milk. Otto saw Albert was sitting in a chair on the circus lot reading. Otto walked over to him and said, "Here's your loaf of bread and quart of milk." Albert didn't even look up, he just said, "Where's the change?" True story.

The evening show was about the same as the matinee, but there was so much more action going on behind the scenes. As soon as props or equipment were finished with, they were removed, and broken down (that is a show expression for taking something apart). Everything, even big props and aerial rigging had to be able to be packed in some box or wagon to make it to the next town. The constant movement of the last show was the process of moving everything out of the big top as soon as it was finished being used. It never interfered with the program, that went on just as smoothly as the matinee, but a lot of extra hard work was going on. When the performers came out, either with their own personal wardrobe or the show wardrobe, it was inventoried, packed in the wagons and taken down to the railroad yards and loaded on the train. At the train, the work crew were there waiting and watching to be sure that everything was safely loaded. The Mack trucks did their jobs.

When the people came out of the big top after the show, they were all confused because the Menagerie was no longer there, the Side Show was gone and all the other tents, except the Dressing Tent. They were all torn down and packed away, leaving a huge, eerie vacuum on the lot. The elephants walked to the train with many of the lead an-

imals. Rain or shine, hot or cold weather, the show moved on. Only the big top crew remained and some of the elephants that helped to take down the big top. That was no easy job. Everyone had something special to do and everyone worked together like ants, all supporting each other. The audience loved the show and we all wondered if we would be back again next year. We surely hoped so.

We were all pretty well exhausted by this time and would load on to the Gilly shuttle bus and head for the coaches on the train. Maybe we'd have a sandwich and a bottle of beer. Maybe we would visit with everyone that we could, and then hit the sack. No one needed sleeping pills. Most would sleep through the night, lulled by the movement as the train moved to the next town.

Even after a cold, rainy, muddy day, we just knew that tomorrow would bring us a dry green grassy lot with a warm sunny blue sky.

We knew that we had "sawdust in our blood" and that "there's no business like show business."

We thanked God, as we all looked forward to being part of, and welcoming the new adventures to come, traveling with Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, The Greatest Show on Earth. **BW**



Lou Jacobs and Dolly Jahn Copeland lead the performers after a production number in 1942.

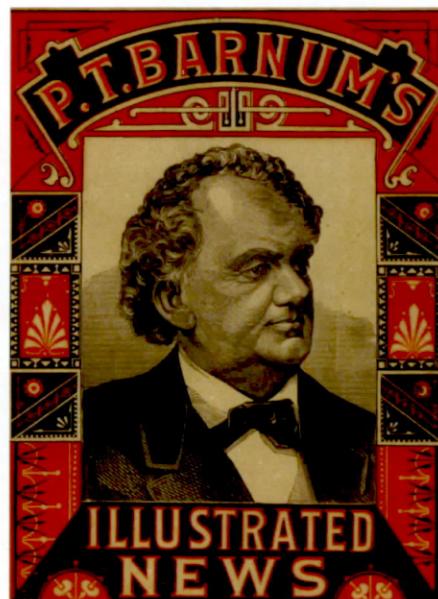
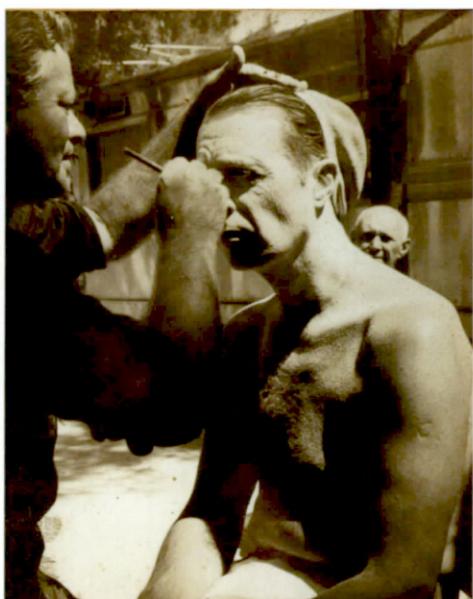
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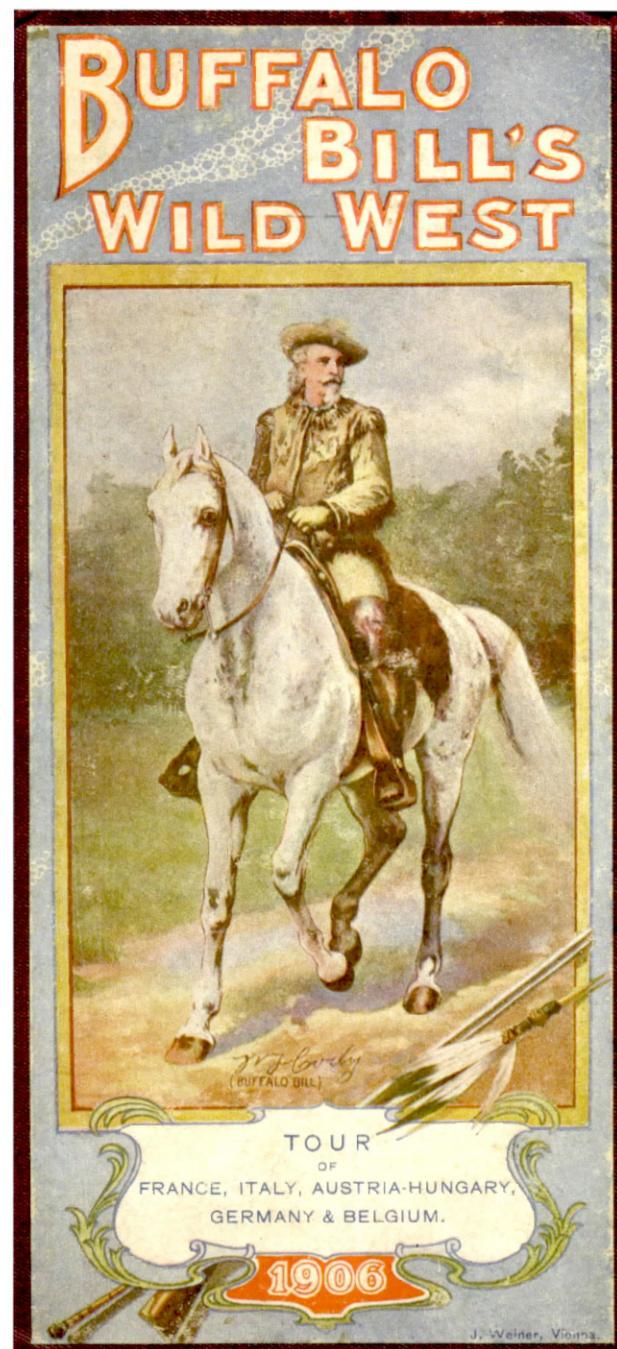


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